

# ALL THE SUPERMAN

by  
(ATA MOHYUDDIN)

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BLISHERS, BOOKSELLERS & EXPORTERS  
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# Ali the Superman



By  
Dr. ATA MOHY-UD-DIN

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## FROM THE PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

In this volume, an attempt has been made to narrate the life-story of Ali, the last of the orthodox caliphs, who, in the Muslim annals, is the most interesting and controversial personality of all times. In this survey I have tried to elucidate his true place in history and it is hoped that for the Muslims it may prove of assistance in the understanding and exposition of the various convictions of the various sects that arose at the time. Ali, the warrior-saint of Islam, spent his entire life in fighting the battles of God and, in spite of his multifarious activities, he lit that torch of knowledge which gave unprecedented impetus to learning—a marvel of the Middle Ages. The greatness and grandeur of his personality, whether it attracts or dominates, has made him a hero of heroes. Sectarian feelings, even recognising his great services which he rendered for the uplifting of humanity, had from sentimental reasons, ascribed him supernatural powers which had been misunderstood and led to sectarian bigotry. In the following pages are narrated the achievements of Ali, his various efforts to keep intact the solidarity of the Muslims and the establishment of a constructive faith to steady the human mind after the strain of that cataclysm to which it has become the prey of partisan spirit. Full care has been taken to confine the narrative within the scope of strict historical background and in strict choronological order. Consequently, controversial issues have been avoided. It must be borne in mind that it was Ali who, affected by political, intellectual and religious

views of the period, gave Islam a distinct outlook and culture.

Undoubtedly, Ali's contributions to Islam have the deepest admiration. Although the sectarian feelings have created a rift in Islam, yet it must be borne in mind that views of Ali's followers do not only possess divine mandate, and that the men of different views who inhabit the planet have the right of their own say. It is encouraging to note that in this age of Science Muslims are not divided into different deterrent categories, and even the sectarian-minded men have begun to realise that it is futile to enforce the sectarian views into bigotry and that by tolerance and magnanimity of mind the human will turn into humane.

No biography of Ali, worth the name, based on scientific data has been written so far in English. The Shi'ite fervour of the propagation of their faith can be gleaned out from the fact that they have failed to produce any book in the English language, which to all intents and purposes has become an international language of the world. Biographies of Ali abound in Urdu, Persian and Arabic, but most of them are written either to depict the sectarian views or to narrate sentimental notions to extol the virtue of this patriarchal caliph and make him super-human. A biography based on the method of integral history—the presentation of all phases of culture and views—is not to be found in a single volume and, if my attempt fills in such a gap, I think my labour is well rewarded. I have persistently attempted to remain impartial, to give the interpretation of each sect from its own point of view. It is further hoped that this work will give the readers plenty of food for thought and plenty to argue about and I feel that it will considerably help the readers to evaluate the achievements of Ali, who

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fixed a definite stamp of his individuality on his times and gave distinct spiritual ideas, moral values, ethical code and made Islamic culture what it is. To the author, the divergent sects of Ali's time are the different gardens which planted variety of flowers, each possessing its own distinct colour and fragrance.

The author has freely drawn both from the Eastern and Western sources. Persistent effort has been made to narrate historical events, battles, various movements of the period and ideas of the people in strict chronological order.

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## THE BACKGROUND

### Strides in Science

Ours is an age in which tremendous strides have been made in the realm of science. This increase in scientific knowledge has been so rapid and so vast in scope, that it has staggered the imagination of man, leaving him bewildered in a world of constantly changing values. With bewilderment has also come fear, for the application of scientific discoveries to modern warfare threaten to destroy not only the familiar ways of life but life itself. The twentieth century has seen, among other inventions, the development of atomic weapons and of the hydrogen bombs, each with its attendant horror of radio active fall-out. It is now known that radio active dust in sufficient quantities could destroy all life on the globe, yet the imperialist powers still continue in mad competition, vying with one another, to produce ever bigger and more lethal weapons. Nor is the horror limited to the potential use of the weapons themselves; each new test carries with it the threat of total annihilation. Humanity lives in constant dread that the world, as we know it, will cease to be.

This struggle for the ascendancy between the great powers has been carried still further, into the realm of outer space. Here, too, each new triumph of scientific research serves only to increase human anxiety; so terrible are the implications of these discoveries when applied to modern warfare. Due to the development in flying devices, unmanned missiles are expected, by 1964 or 1965, to achieve a circular velocity of 17,500 miles per hour. A similar surprise is expected in the domain of

the velocity of light with thermal-atomic, ionic, field-quantum and photon rockets making flights to the moon and other fixed stars only a question of time. With the appearance of ram-jet transport planes we can expect to jot down space stations in the universe from where, with the help of stationary ultraviolet searchlights exerting a radiation pressure of many tons, we shall be capable of destroying flying objects several hundred miles away, in the fraction of a second. Thus, aerodynamics, statics, electronics, theories of combustion and fuel chemistry and all the ramifications of modern science, combine at once to exhilarate, baffle and terrify human beings. Here, too, honest pride in human intellectual achievement is forced to give way to a fearful contemplation of the increased areas of human responsibility.

### **World Movements towards Reform**

For many human beings the weight of this responsibility has proved too much to bear. They take refuge in a stubborn refusal to face the facts or show a stunned apathy. Fortunately, however, increasing numbers of people throughout the world, have awakened to a new realisation of human needs and have become anxious for a deeper understanding of one another. Some, even, go so far as to wish for the amalgamation of all nations into one community. Out of the misery of two World Wars many such movements for human reform have come into being, seeking to preserve human culture and tradition against the onslaughts of scientific destruction. These movements are in themselves spiritual achievements and lend hope to many an aching heart.

In the past, human intelligence has given too much support to material advance at the cost of spiritual values, thinking more of the kingdom of man on earth than of the Kingdom of God. With the kingdom of man on earth now being threatened with total annihilation, many people have awakened to a belated realisation that material things are not enough: it is only to be

hoped that this realisation has come in time.

### **Russian Atheism**

The atheistic, sceptical and materialistic outlook of Soviet Communism has let loose on the world the anti-spiritual forces which, are responsible for killing spiritual values among men. The Communists, finding no visible proof of a Just, Omnipotent and Unseen God, have denied the very existence and usefulness of God, condemning all religions as superfluous and, in an effort to justify their creed, have tried to identify atheism with rationalism. The scientific outlook, they maintain, has no time to spare for outworn religious philosophies.

### **The Bogey of Bolshevism**

Communism is closely associated in the minds of most people, living outside the Soviet bloc, with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. This revolution was a natural and necessary reaction against the despotism of the Czars and of a landed aristocracy that treated peasantry as chattels and denied all privileges to the impoverished masses. Nevertheless, the savagery with which Socialist-Marxist principles were enforced and the cold-blooded massacre of all the privileged classes, including the merchants, manufacturers and tradesmen of the bourgeoisie, has created an indestructible bogey. Terrible atrocities were committed in the name of the betterment of humanity, the memory of which still lingers to create distrust and suspicion the world over.

The Bolshevik Revolution has now become history and, it is not Bolshevism that we should fear to-day. The real bogey is the atheistic nihilistic cult which has emerged as a consequence of that revolution, and the widespread spiritual paralysis that it has engendered.

It is a nihilistic creed, a negation of values, but it would be unwise to assume that it can be arbitrarily dismissed because of its negative character. It is a

dynamic creed, and the creed of what has become one of the most powerful countries in the world. On the strength of it the Soviet Union has built up a distinct bloc of nations, a community, spreading throughout the world. It is not enough; merely to ignore it or dismiss it; it must be actively disproved.

### **The Task of the Theist**

The task of the theist, as opposed to the atheist, is to wage an intellectual warfare against the forces of scepticism and materialism, in the belief that men can live happily and usefully only in a world that recognises spiritual values, of thought and freedom for the individual. It is an uphill task. The theist maintains that spiritual values can win against repression and totalitarianism, but before this can happen these values will have first to be re-established, strengthened and reasserted. Man must once again seek to clarify the relationship between God and himself, for only by doing so can he arrive at those fundamental truths, at present denied to, and by, the Russians.

Every individual who is still free has a moral duty to preserve his individuality and to do every thing in his power to develop his personality. God must be allowed to permeate the life of every believing man and woman, to shape their destinies and to manifest Himself in all they do. Belief must be translated into action, in a willingness to assume responsibility and in a creative desire to better the lot of other less fortunate beings. It is the duty of all of us to take up the challenge of Communism and to demonstrate by works of faith the omnipresence of God in the world of to-day.

### **Physics, Metaphysics and Theism**

The Communist creed rests on a physical interpretation of the facts of the universe and a belief that scientific discovery has advanced so far that it has left religious

thought far behind.

The physicist, like the Communist, confines himself to a detailed study of the facts of the universe, facts which can be empirically determined and from which he can attempt to formulate universal laws. The physicist has also been unable to produce any genuine philosophy of life, to explain the meaning of the universe or the role of the individual therein.

Violent disputes have arisen between the physicists and the metaphysicians. The theist agrees with neither. To him it is obvious that, since God made man "the lord of all creation," scientific knowledge can serve only to reinforce his instinctive knowledge of the infinite greatness of the Creator. Thus, the theist looks elsewhere for enlightenment, not to the scientist, nor to the philosopher, but to the Prophets, through whom God revealed an infallible knowledge and, to the immemorial past to which man is the heir.

In revealed religion the theist finds his answer to atheism. Through freedom to contemplate upon God he finds self-awareness and contentment; only through fear of Him can he avoid sin and guilt, only through repentance and God's mercy can he hope to achieve bliss. The poverty of spirit and the degradation of humanity that characterise atheism cannot solve the riddle of the universe, nor can the scientist solve it. It can only be solved through the way of God.

It is through the way of God that humanity may yet be saved, through a revival of spiritual values that the discoveries of the scientist may be put to the beneficent uses; and the material benefits of modern civilisation brought within the reach of all and for the greater good of all. People who have surrendered themselves to frustration and scepticism can only recover by taking refuge in God and God alone.

### **The Semitic Prophets**

The Prophets of God hold for us to-day, as they did

for our forbears, the answer to our problems. They laboured incessantly for the spiritual uplift of mankind, devoting their lives to the reform of the sinful society of the day and, were often persecuted by their countrymen who found it hard to understand the newness of their ideas. "The central idea in the Prophet's thought" says Dr. Israel I. Mattuck,<sup>1</sup> "is that God is the sovereign of the universe, acting in a moral order which expresses and embodies His righteousness. The idea was new. They attained it by inspiration, but they were prepared for it by experience, and they interpreted it by reason. Mystical experience and ethical reasoning combined to produce their message. They used their reason, but the heavens opened to reveal its truth to them. The truth came to them in flash and it burnt in them constantly with an unquenchable and irresistible fire."

It is interesting to note that, as early as the seventh and eighth centuries before the birth of Christ, Arabia was producing some of the greatest men in the world, those holies of holies who took up the task of world reformation. The old Hebrew Prophets, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Lot, Moses, Joshua and Jesus Christ all laboured to give mankind a set of spiritual values. The history of their lives shows them always on the side of virtue and righteousness, condemning the nefarious actions of kings and people alike, and advocating obedience to the will of God. These were the originators, the models, the men who set the pattern that has ever continued to enrich the world of thought and action. It was their divine revelation that gave a permanent relevance to their ethical pronouncements and universal interpretations. The prophetic role of these sages and the sense of missionary spirit with which they took on the work of reformation adds a glorious chapter to the history of mankind. Through several centuries and in the teeth of great opposition they worked to better the lot of their fellow-men.

1. Dr. Israel I. Mattuck, *The Thought of the Prophets*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1953, p. 32.

**The Darkest Age**

The progress made by humanity in the Near East and Europe suffered a severe set-back after the fall of the Roman Empire and the sixth century A.D. saw Europe relapse into barbarianism once again. Hardly could any Christian read or write; the priestly class, enforcing on their followers the motto of Pope Gregory that "ignorance is the mother of devotion," demanded blind obedience to their dogmas.

Similarly in Asia, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions had deteriorated, becoming mere bundles of outward forms and ceremonial worship. Here, too, class-ridden societies presented sad spectacles of human misery, ignorance and decay.

It was at this juncture that the greatest reformer and revolutionary Muhammad (may peace be upon him) arose. Through his love of knowledge and reverence for learning, mediaeval Europe was once more to become acquainted with art and science and the way was to be paved for the Renaissance.

**Muhammad, the Greatest Reformer of all Time**

Once again it was Arabia that gave birth to this greatest of world-reformers. Muhammad (may peace be upon him), who traced his descent from the Prophet Abraham, was also born in that country of Prophets and there he was destined, not only to found a new religion, but also to establish a new system of ethics and polity. Under him the warring Arab tribes were to be welded into one composite nation, monotheistic, law-abiding and peace-loving. Carlyle,<sup>1</sup> speaking of Muhammad's appearance observes:

"To the Arab Nation it was as a birth from darkness into light; Arabia first became alive by means of it. A poor shepherd people, roaming unnoticed in its deserts

1. Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero-worship*, Oxford University Press, London, 1850, p. 101.

since the creation of the world: a Hero-Prophet was sent down to them with a word they could believe: see, the unnoticed becomes world-notable, the small has grown world-great; within one century afterwards, Arabia is at Grenada on this hand, at Delhi on that;—glancing in valour and splendour and the light of genius, Arabia shines through long ages over a great section of the world. Belief is great, life-giving. The history of a Nation becomes fruitful, soul-elevating, great, so soon as it believes. These Arabs, the man Mahomet, and that one century,—is it not as if a spark had fallen, one spark, on a world of what seemed black unnoticeable sand; but lo, the sand proves explosive powder, blazes heaven-high from Delhi to Grenada! I said, the Great Man was always as lightning out of heaven; the rest of the men waited for him like fuel, and then they too would flame.”

### **Ali, the Foremost of True Believers**

After Muhammad, his first cousin and son-in-law, Ali, is one of the greatest of world-reformers. His life has been considered as an ideal to follow and his achievements have been consecrated and sanctified by his many admirers. The great English historian<sup>1</sup> Edward Gibbon writes of him as “the first of the true believers, the most devout of all the followers of the Holy Prophet . . . “Ali the first of true believers might aspire to march before them in this world and the next; and if some were of a graver and more rigid cast, the zeal and virtue of Ali were never outstripped by any recent proselyte. He united the qualifications of a poet, a soldier and a saint. His wisdom still breathes in a collection of moral and religious sayings, and every antagonist in the combat of the tongue or sword was subdued by his eloquence and valour. From the first hour of his mission to the last rites of his funeral the Apostle

1. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Frederick Warne & Co., London, p. 518.

(Muhammad) was never forsaken by a generous friend whom he delighted to name his brother, his viceregent and the faithful Aaron of a Second Moses."

### **The Theology of the Heart**

Our deep absorption in, and preoccupation with things material and mundane, leave little or no room for concentration on higher and spiritual aspect of our nature. The criterion with which a man is judged today is his material opulence. Accumulation of gold and worship of Mammon are the only objectives of the modern man; his happiness is determined by the possession of "dull, yellow metal", and his lack of happiness is occasioned by its absence or scarcity. So engrossed are we in worldly pursuits that we have no time to think of God. A fortunate few isolate themselves from the world and seek solace in meditation, and contemplation by a temporary withdrawal from secular environment.

Annals record how kings and princes have renounced the world, for material comforts gave them no spiritual solace. Abraham bin Adham, the king of Balkh, craved for inward peace, which he could not obtain in the luxurious life of the royal palace.

It is through contemplation that a man can refine and harmonise the moral sentiments that regulate his conduct in the world of affairs. By Ridding himself of "the fever of this world" man can reach true peace. For such endeavour, however, one must leave "thought" behind. Thought is a form of motion and the desire of the soul can best be fulfilled by that motionless rest which solitary contemplation can give to weary hearts.

### **The Purpose of this Biography**

Contemplation, then, is one way to find God. (This book is written in the hope that it might help some thirsty souls through the study of the sermons and sublime pieces of prose and poetry of one given to contemp-

lation to share the experiences of which they would be incapable alone. The study of the life of a truly great man may help a lesser human being to catch hold of the great fundamental truths of existence, may urge him to do noble deeds, cultivate good tastes, and, through emulation, encourage him to extend his own individual powers.

By studying the lives of great men ordinary people can overcome the feeling of powerlessness which besets so many of us to-day, that feeling of being one of a billion waiting to be obliterated by death. It is through a knowledge of the struggles of the great that one gains the courage necessary to continued belief, that one realises how spurious is the philosophy of totalitarianism, how triumphant the truths of the spirit.

### **The Inspirational Value of a Study of Ali's Life**

The life of Ali is of particular relevance to-day and his many-sided spiritual activities may help to solve for some the problems of existence in the Twentieth century. His ideas were conciliatory and his message always one of peace. He sought always to prevent those civil wars in which blood would be shed in vain, but in his fight against the forces of terror and barbarity he showed extraordinary determination, unwavering purpose and an iron will. He was at once a recluse and a warrior, a contemplative living in the wastes of the desert and a commander fighting the Lord's battle against heretical foes. In his personality he combined a pious resignation in God with the greatest heroism in combat.

His is a life of extraordinary interest, glorious for the spiritual victories that he won. In his attempts to establish God's kingdom on earth he was constantly beset by enemies who wanted to extinguish the torch of Islam, whose activities were the more repulsive in that they were carried on in the name of God and religion. Pitched as he was against envy, hatred and malice, he never permitted himself to falter or to stray from the

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path of right, even though this singleness of purpose was to cost him his life.

To the bewildered humanity of to-day his life cannot but prove an inspiration.



**PART I**

**THE PRE-CALIPHATE CHRONOLOGY**



## CHAPTER I

### EARLY LIFE

#### **A versatile genius**

"The Bayard of Islam,<sup>1</sup> the hero without fear and reproach," the first cousin of the holy Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) and adopted by him as his own son, whose daughter Fatima he subsequently married, the second or third convert to Islam, the staunchest supporter and most valiant warrior that ever championed the cause of Islam—such was Ali. He was the Marcus Aurelius of the new faith, a stoic who ushered in an age of orthodoxy and steadfast belief at which Muslims now look back with awe, wonder and regret. Ali, the alter ego of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) is a colossal figure in the annals of Islam and one who has made for himself an honoured place in the history of all mankind, not only as the fourth and last of the "strict and stern" orthodox Caliphs, the legitimate successors of the holy Prophet, but also as a genius among men.

Ali was a man of many and varied talents, one of the greatest savants, legislators, generals, statesmen, scholars and administrators the world has ever known. In his person he combined the knowledge of Adam, the virtues of Noah, the devotion of Abraham, the awe and majesty of Moses, the abstinence and piety of Jesus Christ, the patience and resignation of Job, the wisdom of Solomon, the prowess of Alexander, the iron determination of Julius Caesar, the sagacity and prudence of Plato, the

Major Osborn bestows these appellative titles on Ali.

scholastic accomplishments of Cicero and the reformatory zeal of Justinian. Ever since his death countless generations of Muslims have felt themselves uplifted in paying homage to him, the most versatile genius of all time. In the annals of Islam Ali's name is synonymous with a redoubtable military prowess that became legendary. His invincible scimitar "Dhul-fakar" which he wielded with both hands, was famous throughout the land, and his Herculean exploits have led to his being depicted as a hero comparable in achievement to Homer's heroes of Ancient Greece. In Muslim countries today the believers in faith continually refer with pride to the numberless exploits of this "beau ideal", this brightest star of the Islamic firmament. Tales also abound in Muslim literature of the prodigious achievements of Ali in piety, of his acute sense of justice, his generosity, his selfless existence, his concern for the uplift of humanity, and his unceasing endeavours to establish God's kingdom on this earth, while the preservation of his brilliant sayings pays tribute to the genius of his mind. The combination of such qualities of head and heart, together with such prowess in arms has lent to his deeds an appearance of the miraculous. In Muslim theology Ali is one of the blessed ten ("Ashrah Mubasharah") to whom paradise has been foretold, through Muhammad (may peace be upon him) by God.

Other titles indicate the admiring reverence with which Muslims think of him. He is "Al-Murtaza" (the chosen one of God), "Abu Hasan" (father of goodness), and the great "Amir-ul-Momineen" (Commander of the Faithful). His military exploits are reflected in the sobriquet "Haidar" literary "Lion".

### **His birth**

He was the son of Abu Talib, an uncle of the holy Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him). Thus he belonged to the Hashimite family of the Quraish tribe, and was the first cousin of the Apostle of God.

Abu Talib's wife Fatima was the daughter of Asad, the famous magnate of the Quraish clan. Fatima gave birth to Ali,<sup>1</sup> in the sanctuary of Ka'bah (House of God) at Mecca on the 13th or 16th day of the month of Rajab in the 28th year of "Am Ul-Fil" (the year of Elephants)—an era which was established to commemorate the Arab victory over the Christian general, Abrah, who had been deputed by Negus, the ruler of Abyssinia, to invade Mecca with horses and elephants. Thus Ali was some thirty years younger than the Holy Prophet Muhammad, who was born in the first month of Rabi in the year of the Elephants: the year 886 from the accession of Alexander the Great of Macedon and 570 of the Christian era.

Tradition places the birth of Ali in the peaceful and holy month of Rajab (the seventh month of the Muslim calendar) when God showers His countless blessings on mankind. "The thirteenth of Rajab" says a Shia writer, "marks the birth of a most precious pearl in the courtyard of the Ka'bah, glowing in its full self-illumination. It was a portion of the very divine light of God that appeared in the human shape and form, and commenced to shine on the highest of the human stages of dignity and reverence." It was in the month of Rajab that Arabs from the length and breadth of their country used to come to Mecca for pilgrimage. Ali's mother, Fatima, an embodiment of chastity and piety, was amongst those pilgrims and with them was viewing the Ka'bah, when she suddenly felt the pains of child birth and prayed to God to help her delivery. A miraculous opening is said to have appeared in the wall of the Ka'bah and to have closed again after Fatima had lodged herself in the cavity. After three days the

1. We do not know the exact date of Ali's birth. Divergent accounts have come down to us. According to Ali's son Hassan, his father died at the age of fifty eight, while according to another son of Ali, namely Muhammad bin al-Hanfia, his father died at the age of sixty three. We know for certain that Ali was murdered in January 661 A.D. Thus according to one account the date of Ali's birth can be placed in 603, while according to the other it can be fixed in 598 A.D., while if he was exactly thirty years junior to the holy Prophet, he would have been born in the year 601 A.D.

wall is said to have opened once more whereupon Fatima emerged, radiant and with the babe in her arms. The Shi'ite traditions allege that Ali had already accepted Islam in his mother's womb and that even during the period of her pregnancy he had always hindered her if she sought to prostrate herself before an idol.

The superstitions Arabs of those times, held that every person as he came into the world was touched by the devil, which was why new-born babies cry at birth. Since Ali was born in a sanctuary to which the devil had no access; he did not cry at birth but was found smiling and without consciousness of original sin. Thus God had interposed a veil between the evil spirits and the child who was to grow up to exalt His Holy Name. Ali has therefore been variously described as having been found like a pearl in the Shell of Ka'bah, or as a sword in the sheath of Allah's house, or as a lamp found in Allah's abode shedding light around.

### **Miraculous Birth Foretold**

The Shi'ite Traditions further make out that the sanctified birth of Ali, as of Prophet Muhammad, was foretold in the scriptures, when God said to Abraham, who asked for a blessing on Ishmael; "And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly, twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." (Genesis 17:20).

The felicitous Prophecy in Genesis 7:16 about the advent of a prophet is said to point to the appearance of Muhammad and Ali, while the "Twelve princes" of the Mosaic Scriptures are held to be none other than the twelve Shi'ite Imams who were born of the seed of Ali.

### **His Lineage**

Ali bin Abu Talib bin Abd-al-Muttalib belonged

to the family of Hashim, a branch of the Quraish which was considered the most venerable in Arabia. Although poor, the Hashimites were held in great esteem for their piety and because of the pontifical office of looking after the Ka'bah which devolved on them by heredity. It should be noted at the very outset that the people of the rival house of Ummayyah, the collaterals of the Hashimites, were more prosperous and powerful in statecraft and secular affairs, but the Hashimites enjoyed a special fame, being the guardians of the Holy Ka'bah. When Abd-al-Muttalib, the grandfather of the Holy Prophet died, it was to Abu Talib that he entrusted Muhammad (may peace be upon him) a trust that was fulfilled with unsurpassed fidelity.

### **Abu Talib's patronage of Muhammad**

When Muhammad (may peace be upon him) took to preaching Islam and the pagans of Mecca began to persecute him it fell to the lot of Abu Talib, as the head of the family of the Hashimites, to stand up for his nephew and to protect him from his adversaries. In consequence of the Holy Prophet's continued activities the Meccans boycotted the Hashimites socially and economically but Abu Talib took his family to the outskirts of Mecca and there suffered the greatest privations with them rather than forsake his nephew. When the Meccan pagans lampooned Muhammad it was Abu Talib who answered them both in verse and with the sword and when the Meccans asked him to prevail upon Muhammad to recant his new preachings Abu Talib's reply was, "Till I have the last spark of life left in me I will not give up Muhammad and will defend him upto my last breath."

Abu Talib acted as the self-appointed bodyguard of the Prophet, taking great care that none armed with a sword or any offensive weapon approached him. But he gave him more than mere physical protection, supplying him with a paternal love and affection that were the

very sunshine of his life.

Nowhere was this love more apparent than at the time of the Holy Prophet's marriage to Khadija. His famous Khutba on that occasion mirrors the esteem in which he held his ward:

"Glory be to the Almighty God" said Abu Talib, "Who has caused us to descend from Abraham and chosen us to descend from the race of great Ishmael. It is the bounty of God to have given us in patrimony the holy land and the sanctuary of the Ka'bah, wherein flock pilgrims from different places, and to have bestowed upon us the honourable offices of the judges and rulers of this country. Muhammad is my nephew, the son of my real brother Abdullah, with whom none of the Quraish can compare and compete in virtue, generosity, magnanimity, bravery, understanding and wit. Although his riches are not equal to his birth and accomplishments (for in truth riches are transitory as a shadow and lent to us by heaven so as to be recalled when God pleases) yet his mental capacities are unsurpassed. My nephew is in love with Khadija, the daughter of Khalid and she likewise with him; and whatsoever is demanded in dowry I will see it settled."

For dowry Abu Talib gave Khadija twenty camels and twelve ounces of gold, although he was a man with a large family of his own and owned slender means.

Ali's mother, Fatima, also loved Muhammad like a son from the time that, at the age of six, he entered her home. According to some traditions she is said to have accepted Islam, and to have migrated to Medina where she died. At the time of her death the Holy Prophet gave his own shirt to be used in her coffin and when the grave had been dug Muhammad is said to have laid himself in it and so sanctified it. When the people asked the Holy Prophet the reason for showing such favours, he replied, "After Abu Talib if ever I was grateful to any one, it was this pious soul who mothered me, nurtured me, brought me up and took me as a son."

**The dying behest of Abu Talib**

Before his death in 618 A.D. Abu Talib called all the members of the Hashimites together and left the following behest:—

“O thou people of Quraish! Thou art the chosen race of God and the best in the world. In my dying behest I will ask you to be kind and well disposed towards Muhammad because he is “Amin” (trustee) from amongst the Quraish and “Sadiq” (the truthful) from amongst the whole population of the Arabian peninsula. He has in his person all those things which compel me to leave a will in his favour. He has tidings to reveal which your heart accepts although for fear your lips do not respond to confirm the call of your heart. I find that the half-barbarians of the Arabian desert, in contrast to you, respond to his call and obey his orders and verily these are the people who will be exalted in this world and the hereafter. Mark me when I say that your chiefs will be dishonoured and stiff-necked though they now are, they will soon be humbled. I see the entire country has sincerity and enthusiasm for his message and the people have widened their heart to receive that love. In short they are willing to follow and obey him. O thou Qurash! It is high time that you should befriend him, support him and follow him in the path that he treads. I swear by God that only those desist to follow him who are not destined to reform, and only those will follow in his footsteps who are destined to be great, pious and noble. If there is some respite or delay in my death and I survive a few more days I will support his cause. As far as lies within my power I will protect him from the evils (of the enemy).” (Rousa-tu’s-Sufa).

With this dying speech Abu Talib passed away at the age of eighty. Muhammad’s grief knew no bounds. The death of his foster-father, the man who had stood by him from his childhood, who had supported him against the conspiracies of the Meccans and who had

been in all things his patron and loving friend, left him alone in the world, Khadija having died shortly before the venerable old man. It is generally believed that the loss of his patron was one of the main reasons for the Holy Prophet's decision to migrate to Medina. Certainly he was so bereft and grief-stricken that he named the year of Abu Talib's death "Am-al-Huzn" or "year of mourning."

### **Muhammad and Ali**

During Abu Talib's lifetime Muhammad had shown his gratitude in many ways. One of these ways had been to accompany his uncle on his long and arduous commercial trips; another had been his adoption of Ali. Muhammad volunteered to look after Ali when he was only five years old. Abu Talib gratefully agreeing told Ali to obey Muhammad in all things and to stick by him through thick and thin. The way in which Ali carried out that behest became the story of his life.

### **Ali's childhood**

Little is known of the details of Ali's childhood other than that he was brought up in the Holy Prophet's household but it is reasonable to infer that it was this environment which moulded him on the Islamic pattern and developed to the full the mental faculties which later made him famous. Here in the home of the Prophet Muhammad and Khadija—both of whom were virtue personified—the boy learned the value of fidelity and chastity, here began his enthusiasm for the reformation of mankind, and here in the closest intimacy with the Holy Prophet came the inspiration to a selfless life in the cause of Islam.

### **Conversion to Islam**

It is known that Ali embraced Islam at a very early

age although the exact date cannot be ascertained. A number of traditions say that Ali accepted Islam at the age of ten. According to some he was the first convert though this honour is usually given to Khadija. Others again hold Ali to be the second convert, but the majority maintain that this honour fell to the lot of Abu Bakr. The consensus of opinion is that Khadija was the first among women to accept Islam, Abu Bakr the first from amongst the grown up men, Zaid bin Harith the first from amongst the slaves and Ali the first amongst the boys.

### **Confirmation in Faith**

In 614 A.D., four years after his divine call, Muhammad took to preaching Islam openly and one day ascended the mountain of Safa and convened an assembly of men for the propagation of the faith. The meeting was greeted by scorn and ridicule from the pagans of Mecca. Undeterred, Muhammad proceeded to attempt the conversion of at least his own family for it was at this critical juncture that he received the divine revelation, "Wa Anzir ashiratakal aqrabin" (And warn your nearest relatives). "Thus resolving" "says Edward Gibbon,"<sup>1</sup> to impart to his family the light of Divine truth, he prepared a banquet, a lamb, as it is said, and a bowl of milk for the entertainment of forty guests of the family of Hashim." Friends and kinsmen "said Muhammad to the assembly," I offer you, and I alone can offer, the most precious of gifts, the treasure of this world and that of the world to come. God has commanded me to call you to his service. Who among you will support my burden? Who among you will be my companion and my vizier?" No answer was returned, till the silence of astonishment, and doubt, and contempt, was at length broken by the impatient courage of Ali, a youth in the fourteenth year of his

1. Edward Gibbon—The Decline and fall of the Roman Empire, Vol. III—London Fredrick Warne & Co., p. 498-99.

age. "O Prophet, I am the man. Whosoever rises against thee, I will dash out his teeth, tear out his eyes, break his legs, rip up his belly. O Prophet! I will be thy vizier over them."

The Prophet ordered Ali to sit down. Again he put the question to the assemblage. All remained silent but Ali rose for a second time to repeat his fidelity and was again ordered to sit down. When the Prophet repeated the same question to the congregation the third time he got no response. Ali again stood up and repeated his fidelity on which the Holy Prophet remarked "You are my brother, my collateral and are what Aaron was to Moses."

Thomas Carlyle<sup>1</sup> refers to this incident thus:—

"Amid the doubt and silence of all, Ali as yet a lad of sixteen,<sup>2</sup> impatient of the silence, started up and exclaimed in passionate and fierce language, That he would! The assembly among whom was Abu Talib, Ali's father, could not be unfriendly to Muhammad, yet the sight there, of one unlettered elderly man, with a lad of sixteen deciding on such an enterprise against all mankind, appeared ridiculous to them; the assembly broke up in laughter. Nevertheless it proved not a laughable thing; it was a very serious thing! As for this young Ali one cannot but like him. A noble minded creature, as he shows himself now and always afterwards, full of affection, of fiery daring. Something chivalrous in him; brave as a lion, yet with a grace, a truth and affection worthy of Christian knighthood."

Ali's boyish declaration was, in later years, to be honoured many times. One such memorable occasion occurred at the time of the Prophet's emigration to Medina.

### **Ali risks his life for the Holy Prophet**

In the Spring of 622 A.D. the confederacy of the

1. Thomas Carlyle—*Heroes and Hero-worship*. Publisher Oxford University Press. Edition 1968, p. 77.

2. Ali was not sixteen at that time, he was hardly ten or eleven.

Meccan pagans, headed by Abu Jahl and Abu Sufyan, the two arch enemies of Islam, hatched a plot to assassinate the Holy Prophet. It was unanimously decided that the preachings of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) ran counter to the interests of the Quraish and that the Prophet's assassination had become necessary for the betterment of the Meccan state. Muhammad's house was to be surrounded at night and a member from each family of the Meccan City-State was to assist in the execution, so that the responsibility of the murder could not be laid at the door of any particular clan or tribe. Tradition says that the Holy Prophet was forewarned by God of the impending danger and ordered to emigrate to Medina. When the Prophet and Abu Bakr left Mecca for Medina Ali was ordered to go and sleep in Muhammad's house on Muhammad's bed.

His heart swelling with love and gratitude at being selected and entrusted with such a dangerous task, Ali asked his master, "If I sleep here in your bed in your stead, will you be safe?" "Yes", said the Holy Prophet. He, then went calmly on to give Ali instructions about what still remained to be done at Mecca before Ali could leave to join Muhammad at Medina. Many articles that had been deposited with the Prophet for safe-keeping were to be returned by Ali to their respective owners; Ali was also to look to the safety of all Muslim women and children.

The task that Muhammad entrusted to Ali was a no small undertaking for a young man of twenty-two or twenty-three years old, but in the way in which he carried it out, Ali showed an unflinching fidelity. He was called upon to deputise for Muhammad at the risk of his own life, for it was highly probable that the mob, furious at being foiled of their chief objective would kill Ali in his stead.

"In the midst of this terrible struggle" says a Shia writer, "between life and death, with whatever tranquility of mind Ali has presented himself, men of understanding and intelligence will ever congratulate him

for it till the end of this world. Too, they will marvel at the Prophet's wise selection of Ali for this night's dramatic performance."

After the Prophet Muhammad accompanied by Abu Bakr had left the house, Ali shut himself up in the Prophet's bedroom, barred its doors and locked them from inside. Covering himself with Muhammad's familiar black cloak, he slept on Muhammad's carpet. The assassins surrounded Muhammad's house at night but finding the doors well closed did not break them. One of them peeped through the shutters and seeing a figure wrapped in Muhammad's well known mantle took it to be Muhammad himself. The assassins then decided to keep watch over the house till the break of day and kill Muhammad when unsuspecting he came out at dawn for morning prayers. "The morning breeze" says<sup>1</sup> Col Bodley, "whispered over the desert. The dawn came mauvely from the east and showed the assassins braced to strike. As the first white rays of the rising sun hit the flat roofs of Mecca, the door of Muhammad's house opened. The men stood ready to spring. They then held back as their astonished eyes rested on the burly figure of Ali standing on the threshold carrying Muhammad's cloak over his arms."

Something in Ali's bearing, some intensely personal quality of heroism, and some personal charm of his demeanour, must have been responsible for his survival on this occasion. The mob held back and we know that Ali stayed on in Mecca for some days returning the entrusted property as the Holy Prophet had directed. Ali then left to join the Holy Prophet in Medina where he became one of the first members of the Fraternity.

### **The Islamic Fraternity: Ali as Muhammad's Partner**

At Medina, the Holy Prophet, by an ordinance,

<sup>1</sup> Col. R.V.C. Bodley—*The Messenger*, p. 113. Publishers Orientalia, Lahore.

had established a bond of fraternity through which every local Ansar (the Medinite helper) was united with a Muslim Meccan exile in formal brotherhood and shared his property and belongings with him. The Meccans were similarly ordered to reciprocate with a share of their earnings. At this juncture Muhammad (may peace be upon him) is said to have selected Ali as his partner in the bond of the brotherhood. This fraternal bond was considered equivalent to blood kinship in matters of inheritance. Every Muslim at his death bequeathed his movable and immovable property proportionately to his collaterals and other relatives and to those whom he adopted in fraternity. Thus Ali became one of Muhammad's heirs.

### **Ali a labourer of the first Mosque**

In the Spring of 623 A.D., the first Spring after his emigration to Medina, the Holy Prophet decided to build the first Mosque, laying its foundation on the site which is today called "Masjid-i-Nabvi". Ali was the first to offer his services as a labourer working alongside the other members of the Fraternity, shovelling the earth when the foundations were being laid and later carrying on his shoulders baskets of mortar and brick which he passed on to the masons. While thus labouring Ali recited the following verses:—

Whosoever builds a mosque  
And works whether sitting or standing  
Puts up with the pain of labour  
While others shirk work  
For fear of dust and pain  
Both of these verily  
Cannot equal each other.

It was in this fashion that the 'First House of God' was constructed of sun-dried bricks resting on stones and with a roof of palmbranches. It was simple in design and devoid of all decoration and when it was finished

Muhammad and Ali are said to have built their own residential quarters beside it. The other companions of the Holy Prophet soon followed suit, building their own houses near them, a row of simple dwelling cottages separated from each other by palm branches cemented with mud. Thus the new Islamic community in Medina took on its outward and visible form, with Ali as the chosen companion of the Prophet.

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## CHAPTER II

# MILITARY CAMPAIGNS

### **The Battle of Badr**

The emigration to Medina had not, however, put an end to Meccan plots to overthrow Muhammad, and the winter of 624 A.D. saw the invasion of Medina by a strong force of Meccan soldiers. Three notable Meccan warriors, Abu Sufyan, Utba, (the father-in-law of Abu Sufyan) and Abu Jahl (an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad) had combined forces to invade Medina with an army of 1,000 strong with 700 camels and 100 horse. Two of Ali's brothers, Talib and Aqueel, also fought on the side of the Meccan pagans.

Muhammad, bearing a white banner and with Ali at his side, came out at the head of 313 ill-equipped soldiers to meet the invaders in the valley of Badr.

In those days warfare followed a different pattern from the bloody carnage of modern times. Before the general battle began, a number of duels were fought between the leading warriors on each side. At Badr, as had been customary in all Arabian battles since pre-historic times, the champions of each force came out of the ranks before the commencement of operations, be-littled their opponents, boasted of their valour, enumerated their heroic achievements and those of their ancestors and asked the other side to depute champions to fight them in single combat. It was only after these duels that the general battle was ensued.

**Ali fights the duel**

Clad in steel armour and equipped with scimitars, Utba, the father-in-Law of Abu Sufyan, his brother Shaiba and the notable flower of the Meccan Arabs Al-walid (father of Khalid) fell out of the lines of the Meccan pagans and challenged the Muslims to come out and fight in single combat with them. In response three Ansars of Medina eager to shed blood in the cause of God and to earn the rewards of martyrdom, stepped out. This greatly enraged the Meccans who cried out at the top of their voices, "Surely we have not come all the way to cross arms with the Medinites against whom we have no grudge. We want the heads of our cousins, men of our own tribe—those renegades of Mecca who have had the audacity to defy us and flee from Mecca—people who now hardly dare to risk a duel with us."

"At the taunt of the Quriashites" says Col Bodley,<sup>1</sup> "Ali dashed out of the Muslim ranks, glittering in breast plate and helmet. He was soon followed by Ubaydah bin al-Harith, a paternal cousin of Muhammad, and Humza who wore an ostrich feather on his cuirass. The three companions were thus closely related to Muhammad and fulfilled the Quraish lust for Hashimite blood."

"The three duels were as rapid as they were murderous. Humza killed Shaiba, while Ali killed al-Walid. Ubaydah was mortally wounded but before he fell, Humza and Ali were able to come to his rescue. Humza hurled himself at Utba and, with a sweep of his sword, cut off his head. In a few minutes three of Mecca's most important warriors had been sent to find out the truth about the hell which Muhammad promised them."

"With a cry of rage three more Meccans darted from under Abu Jahl's banner and assailed the Muslim champions (Ali and Humza). They too went down before the sword of Islam. A further three were dealt with the same fate. There was a moment of hesitancy

1. Col. R.V.C. Bodley—*The Messenger*. 1 age 143.

among the Quraishites. Muhammad did not miss his advantage. With a sharp order he sent his soldiers hurtling into a general attack."

In the general battle that followed, the Meccans were defeated and the flower of the pagan army—warriors like Abu Jahl and Utba whose very names had struck terror in the hearts of the Arabs—were among the fallen. Talib, Ali's brother had been killed and Aqueel, the second brother, taken prisoner. Even more important was the effect of the victory on the morale of the newly-sprung Muslim community.

### **The Quranic version of the Battle of Badr**

The Battle of Badr is narrated in the Qur'an as follows:—

"When you sought help of your Lord and He answered you (saying) I will help you with a thousand of the angels, rank on rank.

Allah appointed it only as good tidings, and that your hearts thereby might be at rest. Victory cometh only by the grace of Allah. Lo, Allah is Mighty, Wise.

When He made the slumber fall upon you as a reassurance from Him and sent down water from the clouds upon you, that thereby He might purify you, and remove from you the fear of Satan, and make strong your hearts and firm (your) feet thereby.

When thy Lord inspired the angels (saying): I am with you. So make those who believe stand firm. I will throw fear into the heart of those who disbelieve. Then smite the necks and smite of them each finger.

That is because they opposed Allah and His Apostle. Whoso opposeth Allah and His Messenger, (for him) Lo! Allah is severe in punishment.

That (is the award), so taste it, and (know) that for the disbelievers is the torment of the Fire."

(Qur'an 8:9-14)

**The enmity of the Jews**

The victory at Badr removed the threat of invasion by the Meccans but the Islamic community at Medina was still a long way from feeling secure. From the beginning the Muslim emigrants had been obliged to endure the bitter animosity of the Jewish tribes that had settled in and near Medina and, when earlier attempts at conciliation failed, Muhammad was forced to resort to stronger measures. Ali, as his right-hand man, took a leading part in all these expeditions.

In order to gain a fuller understanding of the position it is necessary here to digress, to explain how the Jews came to be in Medina in the first place and what manner of people they were.

At the dawn of history the Jews, or 'Hebrews' or 'sons of Israel' had taken by force the country later known as Palestine. From the beginning they were fond of amassing wealth and their habit of lending money to people at exorbitant interest gained them notoriety as the most avaricious race of mankind. As civilisation became more complicated, they gained control of banking in many countries but their greed was to prove their downfall. Actuated partly by motives of nationalism and partly by envy and hatred—for the Jews were living off the fat of the land and exploiting the masses—other races began a steady process of conquest and expulsion. As early as 722 B.C. Sargon II is said to have expelled them from their home. Then followed the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., and of Pompey in 63 B.C., and of Titus in 70 A.D. their final downfall coming after the invasion of Hadrian in 135 A.D. Probably it was the sack of Jerusalem by Titus that compelled the Jewish tribes of the Banu Qainuqa, the Banu Qureiza and the Banu an-Nadir, to seek refuge at Yathrib (or Medina as it was named later on) and settle there. Having settled at Medina, however, the Jews soon wanted to dominate over the local Arab affairs in politics, religion, economics, and sociology.

This led to a continual warfare between the Jewish tribes of Medina and the local tribes of the Banu Aus and Khazraj. Indeed it was because of their fear of these Jewish raids that the Medinites invited Muhammad to come and settle at Medina.

Muhammad's first efforts towards the Jews were conciliatory. He drew up the famous Medina Charter in which the rights of all Jews living in or near the city were safeguarded in the following terms:—

"The Jews who attach themselves to the Islamic Commonwealth shall be protected from all insults, injuries and vexations: they shall have an equal right with our own people to our assistance and good offices: the Jews of the various branches of 'Auf, Najjar, Harith, Jashm, Thalaba and all others domiciled in Medina shall form with the Muslims one composite nation; they shall practise their religion as freely as the Muslims: the clients and allies of the Jews shall enjoy the same security and freedom; the guilty shall be pursued and punished, the Jews shall join the Muslims in defending Medina against all enemies, the interior of Medina shall be a sacred place for all who accept this charter; the clients and allies of the Muslims and the Jews shall be as respected as the patrons, all true Muslims should hold in abhorrence every man, guilty of crime, injustice or disorder: no one shall uphold the culpable, though he were his nearest of kin."

But in spite of these concessions, the Jews remained inimical to Muhammad and the Muslims. Muhammad's emphatic insistence that he was God's Apostle, the promised Messiah and the Redeemer of mankind irritated the Jews who refused to accept the fact that any one other than a person of their own race could interpret the will of God. The Jewish belief in a theocratic government, with their own Prophets as the only legal interpreters of God's will, had long made them an intolerant people. How far they were prepared to carry

their policy of intolerance had already been demonstrated in their persecution of Jesus Christ and of Paul and they were now, some centuries later, equally unwilling to leave Muhammad unmolested. Syed Ameer Ali<sup>1</sup> says of the situation at Medina:—

“We have seen with what bitter animosity the Jews dogged Muhammad’s footsteps from the moment of his arrival at Medina. They tried to sow disaffection among his people. They libelled him and his followers. They mispronounced the words of the Qur’an so as to give them an offensive meaning. But this was not all. By their superior education and intelligence, by their union with the party of the “Munafikin” (the hypocrites), and by the general unanimity which prevailed among them (so different from the disunion of the Arabs), the Jews formed a most dangerous element within the federated state which had arisen under the Teacher of Islam. Among unadvanced nations poets occupy the position and exercise the influence of the press in modern time. The Jewish poets by their superior culture naturally exercised a vast influence among the Medinites; and this influence was chiefly directed towards sowing sedition among the Muslims, and widening the breach between them and the opposing faction.”

The Muslims could not tolerate the satires and lampoons of the Jewish poets, especially those of Asma, daughter of Merwan, a Jewish poetess whose daily output of obscene couplets about Muhammad and his companions, was on every one’s lips in the streets of Medina. Omeir, a devout Muslim, incensed beyond measure, entered Asma’s apartment one night and stabbed her; Abu Afaq, another Jewish poet, was similarly murdered by a Muslim. This led to an open breach between the Muslims and the Jews.

### **The “Munafikin”**

The Jewish instigation of the “Munafikin” referred

1. Syed Ameer Ali—*The Spirit of Islam*, p. 72. Publishers Christophers, London. Edition 1955.

to by Syed Ameer Ali in the preceding passage constituted such a powerful threat to Muhammad that further reference needs to be made to this political party. The "Munafikin" or "Hypocrites" had been amongst the earliest converts to Islam but their conversion had been prompted by self-interest and expediency and they had paid only lipservice to its tenets. Urged on by the Jews, they were now as ready to turn against the Muslims as they had previously been eager to join with them, and their leader, Abdullah bin Ubayy, became, with Jewish support a serious threat to Muhammad (may peace be upon him).

### **Operations against the Banu Qainuqa, February 624 A.D.**

The first of the Jewish tribes to break the charter of agreement with the holy Prophet were the tribesmen of the Banu Qainuqa, who had settled in a walled stronghold outside Medina. When Muhammad called upon them to respect the alliance, their leader became infuriated and said, "O Muhammad! Do you take us to be akin to the men of your tribe and race? So far you have only crossed arms in war with the rabble of your own tribe whom you could defeat, dictate and slay. But when you meet us, by the Lord of Israel, you shall know what tough men we are." Even this did not make Muhammad to take the offensive against them, though he told them to take warning.

"Once again "says Col Bodley,"<sup>1</sup> the Jews did not heed the warning. A Muslim girl was seated in the shop of one of the Banu Qainuqa waiting to be served. A light hearted Hebrew youth crept up behind her and pinned her skirt to her bodice. Arab women, then as now, never wear panties under their voluminous petticoats. The result was that the young lady walked unsuspectingly into the street with her posterior exposed.

1. R.V.C. Bodley—*The Messenger*, p. 155. Publishers Orientalia, Lahore. Ed. 194.

The lewd jeers of the practical jokers made her rush back into the shop blushing with shame. At the same time a Muslim who had witnessed the occurrence drew his sword and fell on the laughing Jews and killed one. Before he could kill a second, he was killed himself."

This exhausted the patience of Muhammad (may peace be upon him). He prepared an army and, giving the white banner (under which the Muslims had fought in the Battle of Badr) to Ali ordered him to besiege the Jewish stronghold. After a fortnight, starvation drove the men of Banu Qainuqa to lay down their arms in surrender. Some four hundred Jews of the Banu Qainuqa were marched off with their hands tied behind their backs, but Muhammad with his usual clemency did not have them beheaded. Instead they were banished to migrate eventually to Syria, and their homes and land near Medina were confiscated. In accordance with Muhammad's ordinance the booty was shared among all men of the Fraternity. The Prophet's own share on this occasion was the ancient sword, the bow, and the silver cuirass which Saul had offered to David when he had gone out to fight with Goliath.

### **Operations against the Banu Nadir (June to July 625 A.D.)**

The defeat and expulsion of the Banu Qainuqa was felt keenly by the other Jewish tribes living in or around Medina. Kab bin Ashraf, the notorious poet of the Banu Nadir, began to lampoon Muhammad (may peace be upon him) in verse. Not satisfied with these somewhat slight compositions, he next went to Mecca, where he composed elegies on the Meccan warriors who had been killed at Badr in an attempt to incite them to retaliate for their defeat on that occasion. On his return to Medina, he was killed by the Muslims but the work of sowing discord was now taken up by another Jew of the Banu Nadir, Abu Rafi Sallam bin Abul Haqaiq. Abu Rafi who lived in the Jewish stronghold of Khyber, some

five day's journey by camel to the north west of Medina, successfully incited the neighbouring Arab tribes of Sulaim, and Ghatafan to rise against the Prophet.

Continual threats of this nature made the defence of the city-state of Medina imperative, for the very existence of the Islamic community was at stake. Chiefly relying on the support of Abdullah bin Ubayy, the leader of the "Hypocrites," the Jews were now openly defying Muhammad's authority and a call from him to mend their ways produced only a defiant answer.

By this time the numerous breaches of faith on the part of the Jewish tribes had placed them outside the protection of the defensive alliance into which, under the terms of the Medina charter, they had entered with Muhammad. The Holy Prophet need have felt no compunction at making war upon them. Nevertheless, ever anxious to avoid useless bloodshed, Muhammad resolved to make one last effort at negotiation, deciding to go in person to their stronghold.

Accompanied by a small band of unarmed followers, he set up camp just outside the walls of the Jewish citadel, but his desire to avoid the use of force was wrongly interpreted by the Jews as a sign of weakness and they treacherously plotted to kill him. The Prophet getting news of their intention, which was for a Jewish soldier on the ramparts to hurl a stone at his forehead, decided to withdraw. He now realised that the Jews were desperate and that conciliation would no longer be possible but, as his men were unarmed, he decided to conceal his suspicions rather than precipitate a struggle in which all the advantages would be with the enemy.

Meanwhile Ali, alert as ever, received intelligence that a party of the Jews, led by Urwa bin Anis, meant to fall on the Muslims that night. Ali waited in concealment and when, at nightfall the Jewish soldiery came out, intercepted them. In his first duel he sliced off Urwa's head. He then continued to give battle to Urwa's followers, fighting single-handed in the darkness until God sent succour in the form of Muslim soldiers, Abu

Duj'jana Ansari and Suheil ibn Hanif, who had come out to forage in the enemy territory. With the arrival of this unexpected reinforcement Ali found new strength, continuing to fight on until the major portion of the Jewish contingent had been killed and the remainder had fled back into the citadel.

Ali then returned to the Muslim camp to begin a siege of the Jewish stronghold, which according to Tabri, lasted for eleven days. When the Jews saw that total starvation faced them, they surrendered. They agreed to evacuate the citadel, and once again the Muslims allowed them a free passage to emigrate to Syria or elsewhere. They were allowed to take all their movables with them except their arms but their immovable property was distributed among the "Muhajarians" (Emigrants of Mecca) according to custom.

In these campaigns against the Jews Ali had, once again, played an inestimable part in saving the life of the Holy Prophet and in routing the enemies of Islam.

### **Ali the Warrior**

Much of the credit for the Muslim victories in these campaigns, as at Badr, must go to Ali. Here he had already begun to show those heroic qualities that were to make his name a legend. Tales abound in Muslim literature of his impetuous courage, his mighty strength with sword and scimitar, and his dauntless valour. To his physical prowess were added qualities of mind and spirit that contributed still further to the terror in which he came to be held by the rank and file of the enemy forces. Time and again he was to lead his warriors to victory when, to a lesser man, defeat would have seemed a certainty. Nothing would persuade him to leave the field of a battle no matter how hopeless a situation might be. He fought in all save one of the wars of the Holy Prophet and his presence on the battlefield embodying as it did the very spirit of devotion to Islam, proved a continuous source of inspiration to the Muslim forces.

under his command.

### **The Physical Appearance of Ali**

Ali was not a tall man, but of middle height or possibly even shorter. Such records as exist describe him as muscular, broad, burly—an impressive rather than a handsome figure. He had, however, a superb head, with a face as noble as the man himself. His nose was straight and his mouth beautifully formed. His eyes were his most commanding feature, being full of light and lustre, and his whole being exuded a strong, personal magnetism. The mobility of his face reflected the receptive mind and fiery vigour of this warrior-hero but when his face was in repose all who came into contact with him received an ineffaceable impression of spirituality.

This intangible quality, this profound and magnetic personality remained with him—as did his musical and commanding voice—even after the good looks of his youth had faded. The physical fatigue of incessant warfare, combined with the mental exhaustion that arose from having to deal with endless conspiracies and political treacheries, was to leave its mark on his personal appearance. At fifty-five he had become corpulent and bulky and his grey hair was rapidly giving way to baldness. His beard, however, remained thick and luxuriant and he often dyed it red.

Dr. Will Durrant,<sup>1</sup> speaking of Ali at the time of his accession to the Caliphate speaks of him thus:—

“He had been in his youth a model of modest piety and energetic loyalty. He was now fifty-five, bald and stout, genial and charitable, meditative and reserve. He shrank from a drama in which religion had been displaced by politics and devotion by intrigue.”

But this is to anticipate. The Ali of 624 was handsome, impetuous, full of fiery vigour, truly the “Haidar” or “lion” of Muslim heroes.

1. Dr. Will Durrant—*The Age of Faith*, p. 192. Publishers Simon and Schuster. Edition 1950.

## CHAPTER III

# ALI'S MARRIAGE

### Marriage in Islam

By 624 A.D. the Holy Prophet's daughter, Fatima, had reached marriageable age and the Holy Prophet was confronted with the problem of finding a suitable husband for her. Unlike the love marriages of the West, where the parties concerned select their own partners, marriages in the East are conducted by the parents and it is considered the duty of every father to provide a suitable match for his son or daughter. Marriage, according to Islam, is incumbent on every male or female, and a state of celibacy is deemed unnatural and obnoxious.

### Claimants to Fatima's hand

Among the Faithful followers of the Holy Prophet were two, Abu Bakr and Umar, who were most anxious to marry Fatima and so cement and strengthen their relations with the Holy Prophet; but when they approached Muhammad (may peace be upon him) separately on the subject, the Apostle of God silenced them, saying that he had yet to wait for God's command. From this they inferred that their suit was rejected and this left the field open to Ali, the only other person amongst the companions of the Holy Prophet who might be considered fit for such a match. Ali himself was hesitant, about approaching his master on the subject, because of sheer poverty, saying to Abu Bakr and Umar, when

they discussed the matter with him, "Since both of you have been refused this honour, how can a poor person like me have the courage to address the Apostle in the matter." This discussion, which was to have an important effect on Ali's life took place in an orchard where Ali was feeding his camel. Full of fraternal feelings, Abu Bakr and Umar had resolved to have a heart-to-heart talk with the young man and they urged him to press his suit. His objections they met by saying, "Because you are the first cousin of the Prophet you have a better claim than any one else. Moreover the Holy Prophet, who loves his daughter with all his heart would like to give her to a pious and upright man of your calibre." Thus encouraged Ali, who had long admired Fatima resolved to see the Holy Prophet and ask for her in marriage.

### **Acceptance of Ali's suit**

In the interview that followed Ali's usual bold courage deserted him and he found himself scarcely capable of utterance. Finally he overcame his bashfulness sufficiently to say with down-cast eyes, "O Lord! Since you have fathered me from infancy, fed me, clothed me, educated me, and above all instructed me to follow the right path of Islam, it behoves you now to see me settled in life. "At this the Holy Prophet said, "Since it is my daughter's hand that you seek in marriage, I cannot say anything until I have consulted her." Forthwith the Holy Prophet went to Fatima and said, "My dear daughter, you are well acquainted with our blood relationship with Ali, his prowess and valour, his uncommon intelligence and his active loyal service to the cause of Islam. I have prayed to God to give me a son-in-law who may be a chosen friend of God—a man whom He may hold dear. Now Ali asked me for your hand. Give me your views on the matter." Fatima, however, could not find words to reply, whereupon the Apostle of God stood up and said that her

silence could be considered as tantamount to consent.

Even to-day a bride in the East gives her consent by silence, a tradition that dates from the behaviour of Fatima on this occasion. The Shi'ite traditions say that, at this juncture, the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad (may peace be upon him) saying that God had performed Fatima's marriage with Ali in Heaven and that He now ordered His Apostle to perform the same on this earth.

### **Ali's dower**

Having accepted Ali's suit, the Holy Prophet next asked him, "What dower can you bestow upon Fatima?" Ali said "I own a camel and a coat of mail and these are all the earthly possessions which I can call my own." The Holy Prophet then said, "Surely a camel is an indispensable necessity for a warrior and it would be unwise to part with it. The armour is an equally essential requisite, but should you agree to sell it, the proceeds of the sale will be acceptable as dower money." This settled the terms of the marriage contract.

### **The Sale of the Armour**

Ali then went to Uthman, who was renowned for his wealth among the Muslims and offered his armour for sale. Uthman agreed to buy it for 280 dirhems<sup>1</sup> according to one account and for 500 dirhems according to another and paid the amount in cash then and there. After the transaction, Uthman said to Ali, "Since you have completed the sale of the coat of mail I have become its legal owner. Now I can dispose of it as I like best." To this Ali replied "Undoubtedly you can". Uthman then said, "You have a better claim upon this armour

1. Dirhem was a silver legal unit or coin of the value of three and half annas. It weighed one gram in weight and used to be 1/20 or 1/25 of the value of a golden Dinar. Five hundred dirhems in Pakistani currency should be taken as equivalent of the value of Rs. 107 and in the British Sterling it may be considered equal to £8/-.

than I or any one else. I give it to you as a free gift. It will be a souvenir from me. Please accept it." Ali then went to the Holy Prophet and told him what had occurred, and the Apostle of God is said to have prayed to God to multiply his blessings on Uthman.

### **Preparations for the Wedding**

Ali gave the money from the sale of the armour to the Holy Prophet, who instructed Abu Bakr to purchase with it, on his behalf, the articles necessary for Fatima's dowry. Abu Bakr, accompanied by Ummar Yasir and Bilal, the famous Muezzin of Islam, went shopping. They purchased bed-clothes, a mattress, two pillows having leather covers, a cloth sheet, a bed, two earthen bowls, two earthen pitchers, a hand mill, a sieve, a leather bag, a mat for offering prayers, a leather bucket for drawing water and dress. Such money as remained was returned to the Holy Prophet, who spent it on perfumes for the ceremony.

### **The Khutba and the Marriage**

Then the Holy Prophet, accompanied by his companions, went to the Mosque, and, in the presence of all the Muslims who had assembled there delivered the following Khutba:—

"All praise is due to God, who should be extolled for his various bounties (on us), worshipped for His power and Majesty, and obeyed for his omnipotence, and (it behoves) people to seek refuge in Him for fear of His wrath. His are the ordinances which prevail in Heaven and earth. He is the one Who by His might ordained the existence of all creation through His commandments, gave (us) the power of discrimination, honoured (us) by giving His religion which he magnified through His Prophet Muhammad. Undoubtedly the Almighty Lord made matrimonial alliances as the means of a fresh relationship which is a fundamental necessity, a just

affair, and through it linked the creation and made it incumbent upon all and sundry. Verily Allah is He, who has created human beings from a drop of blood. For this end He created the relations with his people-in-law. Surely God is Omnipotent. His decrees are enforced according to His decisions and His judgments determine the fate and every fate is governed by an appointed time and every appointed time has been predetermined. Over and above this, God can obliterate or keep intact whatever He likes. The original record of all this is with Him. Now in obedience to the will of God, I perform the marriage ceremony of Fatima with Ali and ask you to bear witness that I have given Fatima's hand in marriage to Ali for 400 pieces of silver coins. Should Ali give his assent to it, the same is deemed to have been executed and confirmed. May God create love between the pair, bless them, purify their off spring, make their progeny a mine of wisdom and a source of God's blessing and be a source of solace to the believers in faith. After this, I ask the forgiveness of God, for you and myself."

Having delivered the Khutba the Holy Prophet smiled and, turning towards Ali, said, "God has ordered me that I should give Fatima in marriage to you and thus do I lawfully wed her to you for 400 pieces of silver coins. Do you consent to it.?" Ali said, "Verily I do". Then Ali prostrated himself before God. After a service of thanksgiving in which the Holy Prophet asked God for His blessing on the pair, praying, "O Almighty Lord! Bless them both and better their endeavours and give them noble children" the marriage was performed and Ali and Fatima were proclaimed man and wife. Addressing Ali, the Holy Prophet then said, "O Ali, lucky art thou indeed! Of all the virtuous women of the world, your wife is the queen." Then turning towards Fatima the Holy Prophet said, "Of all the virtuous men of the world your husband is the king. May God keep you pious and chaste and bless your children. Verily I am a friend to him who befriends

you both and an enemy to him who is your enemy."

After the marriage, Ali gave the customary "Walima" or the Wedding Banquet to his friends and here the newly married pair received the congratulations of the wives of the Holy Prophet. From amongst the many poems written for the occasion some verses by the Holy Prophet's wife Hafsa (daughter of Umar, the Great) became popular. She wrote:—

Fatima is superior to the womankind in the world,  
The lady whose face shines like the full moon,  
The bride whose groom is that gem in scholarship,  
that he excels all those who are present.

According to some authors, Ali at the time of marriage was twenty years and five months while Fatima was fifteen years and five and half months old; others insist that Fatima had attained the age of eighteen. All are agreed, however, that the marriage was an ideally happy one, notwithstanding Ali's dire penury.

### **The poverty of Ali**

Ali was extremely poor and the young couple were obliged, from the first, to live from hand to mouth. Often days elapsed without his oven seeing the heat of a fire. His bed-sheet was so small that, if he covered his head, his legs became naked and if he covered legs, his head was exposed. Fatima worked like a slave in the house: she cooked the food with her own hands and in the performance of her household duties she dirtied her clothes so much that they became as black as charcoal. The shoulder on which she carried the pitcher from the well, became swollen, and, the hands that ground the wheat in the hand-mill were often covered with blisters. Many a time she had to go without any food all day long.

Distressed by the hard labour that she had to perform, Ali told his wife to go to the Holy Prophet and ask him to give them a slave-girl from amongst some pri-

soners of war that had been brought to Medina. Finding a big crowd gathered round her father's house, Fatima was compelled by modesty to return home without having an interview. Next day, the Holy Prophet came to Fatima's house to ask what she had wanted and when Ali explained why he had sent her, the Apostle replied, "The distribution of booty is not yet finished but many people have made claims for prisoners and some are superior to yours. Would you not prefer that I tell you of a thing which is far superior to taking a slave?" "yes" they both answered. "Then", said he "before retiring to bed repeat "Subhan Allah" Glory be to God and Al-Hamdo L'illah (All praise is due to God) thirty three times each All-ho-Akbar" (God is great) thirty four times. This will prove better for you than all the slaves that you can possess".

On another occasion when the Holy Prophet was visiting Fatima she grumbled that there was no provision in the house and that constant hard work had sapped her energy and impaired her health. The Holy Prophet said, "Darling, but surely would'nt you like to be the leader of womankind on the day of Judgment?"

### **An Ideal Marriage**

The young Ali—fiery, impetuous, wrathful—cannot have been the easiest of husbands to live with, the very qualities that made of him such a hero on the battlefield being those least likely to make for peace at home. Fatima too, though modest and innocent, seems to have been a young woman of determination. Like all young couples they had their differences and on one such occasion Fatima, much put out, went to her father's house, there to complain bitterly to him of Ali's shortness of temper.

Ali, distressed at having upset her so badly followed her there and concealed himself behind the shutters. "Listen, O Fatima," he heard the Prophet say, is there any married couple in this world which does not have

minor differences at some time or other? Is it therefore absolutely essential that a man should always bow down before the advice of a woman?" Ali, in his hiding-place was much affected by what he had heard and resolved henceforward to control his temper and to do nothing to which Fatima might take objection.

In this incident the reader is privileged to catch a glimpse of Ali and Fatima as living and breathing human beings. They step out from between the pages of history and reveal the small faults that lay behind all the noble epithets that were later to be too liberally bestowed on them. On such occasions they were indeed fortunate that the Holy Prophet was there to mediate between them and, in his wisdom, to teach them how to gain control of the less worthy part of their natures. Muhammad always required Ali to be kind and affectionate to Fatima but, at the same time, he used to remind her that one of the principal duties of a wife was to submit to her husband. Thus on basis of mutual consideration, and strengthened by the unbounded love and affection that the young couple felt for each other, the marriage of Ali and Fatima flowered into an ideal union. Often the Prophet urged them to prayer, as he did on the occasion when Ali wanted a maid-servant for Fatima, and the young couple also found discipline in fasting and in devotional exercises for the purification of the soul. This sharing of their spiritual experiences brought them ever closer to each other so that, in their maturity, the bond that already existed between them proved indissoluble.

### **The Birth of Hasan and Hussain**

In the middle of the month of Ramadan, in 625 A.D., Fatima gave birth to a son, Hasan. The Holy Prophet, after the seventh day of the birth, performed the "Aqeeqa" and circumcision ceremonies. The infant's head was shaved and when the hair had been weighed with silver, the money was distributed amongst

the poor. Two lambs were killed and a banquet was given to celebrate the occasion. In the month of Shaban in the year 626 A.D., Fatima gave birth to her second son Hussain (the future martyr of Kerbala). Again, after the seventh day of the birth, the Holy Prophet performed the "Aqceqa" and circumcision ceremonies and gave the banquet. In all Fatima bore Ali six children, three boys and three girls. Mohsin, the youngest boy, died in infancy, but the two other boys and the three girls, Ruqayya, Umm Kalthum and Zaynab, survived.

### **The character of Fatima**

Fatima, whose off spring were to claim the sinless and semi-divine office of Imamate, was undoubtedly a pearl unique amongst the greatest ornaments of womanhood. In her person she embodied the chosen type of female innocence and meekness. A Shi'ite tradition says that on the Day of Judgment, clad in mourning for the martyrdom of her two sons Hasan and Hussain, with her head draped, and weeping over the afflictions of the great Martyrs, Fatima will wear the martyr's palm and a crown over her head. It is on this day that, surrounded by angels, she will act as "Our Lady of Mercy" and through her intercession, many will go to paradise. Under her mantle many a penitent will gather to find solace and her intercession will save many a sinner from the inevitable doom.

The historian, John J. Pool,<sup>1</sup> speaking of her character as daughter, wife and mother says of her:—

From all accounts she was truly a model character. She was greatly renowned for her wisdom, her holiness, her religious zeal, her domestic virtues, the meekness of her behaviour and her unselfishness, which constantly found expression in generous gifts to the poor and needy. With regard to her deeds of extraordinary charity,

1. John J. Pool—*Studies in Mohammadanism*, p. 45. Ed. 1892. Publishers Archibald Constable & Co. London.

innumerable tales are told of which the shortest and the best, I think, is the following:—

It happened that Hasan and Hussain (sons of Fatima) fell ill, and one day when the Holy Prophet called to see them, he suggested to the sorrowing parents, Ali and Fatima, that they should, as was customary on such occasions, make a vow to God for the recovery of their children. They willingly assented, declaring that if the little ones got well, they would perform a strict fast of three days in gratitude for the goodness of God. Shortly afterwards the boys recovered, and then the parents, along with their one maid-servant, Fidda, began their fast. From the morning till the night of the first day not a morsel of bread nor a drop of water crossed their lips. When the sun went down, however, they were permitted to take some refreshment. For the three days Fatima had provided herself with three measures of barley and it was arranged that one measure each evening should be made into cakes and eaten. On no account would they seek other or better food. The first evening arrived, the cakes were prepared, and the family, having attended to their devotions, assembled round the homely meal with thankful hearts and contented spirit. They were just about to partake of the cakes and break their fast, when a voice of distress caught their ears. It was a cry of an old man at the door—"Give me, O give me," said the voice, "For the love of God, something to relieve my hunger, and to save my famishing family from perishing."

Fatima glancing at her husband said, "How can we, the Prophet's children, refuse that cry?" In a moment, gathering together all the cakes, and hurrying to the door, with them, she gave them, with her blessing, to the old man. Ali looking on, approved the self-sacrifice, and even the maid servant heaved no sigh, though that night neither she, nor her master and mistress, had a bite or sup."

The next day was passed in useful occupation, and when evening drew nigh the same humble fare of five

barley cakes was placed on the table and the little household sat down to it with appetites made doubly keen by the lengthened abstinence. Again, as they were about to partake of it, came the cry, "For the love of God." Fatima hurried to the door to see what was the matter, and found there two orphan children pathetically praying for food. The sight moved the compassionate mother, whose own children were so well off, and who had so mercifully been spared to her when she had feared to lose them. Returning to her husband she said, "It is surely the Will of God and of His Apostle that we should succour the needy. Let the little ones have our meal." Ali, struck with the self-denying zeal of his wife, answered, "as thou wilt and as God Will." Thus for a second night the household went without food. With feebleness of body and yet with brave spirits, they attended to the duties of the morrow and on the third evening sat down with glad hearts to partake of the simple provision that remained. This story was made public by Fidda, the servant, for Ali and Fatima were so accustomed to performing such deeds of charity that they never referred to it. When Muhammad (may peace be upon him) heard it he was filled with joy and said all generations would call him blessed for being the father of such a noble woman as Fatima, the wife of Ali. Fatima lived for many years after that event, and was the admiration of the Faithful, both at Medina and Mecca."

### **Fatima, one of the Four Perfect Women**

According to Muslim theologians Four Perfect Women have come into this world. The first of these was Asiyah, the wife of the Pharaoh of the Exodus, the ruler of Egypt, who is said to have hearkened to and followed the faith of Moses. She was persecuted by her husband but did not waver in her faith. In order to diminish her sufferings God sent His angels to protect her from affliction with their wings and thus strengthen

her in body and soul. The second was Mary, the mother of Christ, who was absolutely sinless. Some Christian writers hold that the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, as conceived by the Catholic Church, was taken over from Muslim theology. Mary is thus extolled in the third Sura of the Qur'an:

"O Mary! Verily God has chosen thee and hath purified thee and thou shalt bear the Word and his name shall be Christ Jesus..... God hath chosen thee above all the women of the world."

The third perfect woman was Khadija, the first wife of the Holy Prophet the mother of Fatima and the first of women to accept Islam. For her piety, modesty, chastity and nobility of character she is described as a princess among womankind. "Like Mary the mother of christ, she is held as the personification of all virtues, an ideal mother and wife. Last but not least is Fatima, the daughter of the Holy Prophet and Khadija. She is styled as "Our Lady" by the believers in faith and is held to be greater than the other illustrious three. Endowed with all the humane and pious qualities that a female can possess she is depicted as the perfect model of womanhood—a model worth imitating by the fair sex. The fame of her noble character, her unostentatious mode of life, her humility, her selfless life and nobility of deportment have become proverbial in Muslim countries. So far above other women was she that Ali did not take any other woman to wife until after her death in spite of polygamy being the custom in Arabia at that time.

### **Polygamy in the East**

At the time of Ali's marriage to Fatima a man's wealth all over the world, was measured by the land and cattle that he possessed and the number of children he had. A new bride was expected to bring her own fortune with her and thus augment her husband's resources.

In a country like Arabia, where polygamy was the order of the day, the taking of several wives by a single person was considered more of a virtue than a vice. The more wives a man had the greater his possessions, and the more children he fathered the better placed he would be.

### **Ali Contemplates a Second Wife**

In accordance with Arabian custom, Ali is said at one time, to have entertained the idea of marrying Jouriya, the daughter of the wealthy and proud Abu Jahl, and to have negotiated with him on the subject. When Fatima heard of his she said to her father, "The Quraishites taunt us and say that the Holy Prophet is heedless of the honour of his daughter". The same day when the Apostle of God went to the mosque to conduct the prayers, in his "Khutba" he addressed the congregation and said, "Verily Fatima is a part and parcel of my heart. Whosoever harms her harms me. I cannot make unlawful what has been made lawful and ordain lawful what has been declared unlawful. I swear by the Almighty God that the daughter of the Prophet cannot live under the same roof with the daughter of an enemy of God. Should Ali divorce Fatima, he is at liberty to marry Abu Jahl's daughter."

### **Ali Remains Faithful to Fatima**

The thought of divorcing Fatima was too great for Ali to bear and he gave up all thought of marrying Jouriya. It was not until long years after—when Fatima was dead—that he married again. He then contracted several marriages but none of these was of significance compared with the ideal union that he had known with the Holy Prophet's daughter, Fatima whom he had married when he was young and poor but most divinely blessed.

## CHAPTER IV

## ALI AND THE "GHAZAWATS"

**Ali's participation in all the "Ghazawats"**

Ali is said to have participated in all the "Ghazawats" (the holy wars fought by the Holy Prophet), except the Tabuk Expedition, when he was left as Governor of Medina to look after domestic affairs. His dauntless courage, fortitude and unflinching loyalty made him the main hero of all these campaigns and the carnage of his sword "Dhulfakar" established such awe and terror in the ranks of the enemy that it led to the saying "None of the weapons slaughtered more than the 'Dhulfakar'". It was the valour of Ali and the strength of his arms that turned the tables at critical juncture on the battlefield, and it was the victories won by him over the Meccans that ensured the triumph of Islam over polytheism.

**The Battle of Uhud**

In January 625 A.D. Abu Sufyan, the leader of the Meccans mustered an army of 3000 strong and marched on Medina to avenge the scandal of the defeat at Badr. Muhammad (may peace be upon him) collected with great difficulty a force of 700 ill-equipped Muslims and 300 Jews. The Muslim army was no match for the Meccan army which was superior in arms, equipment and numbers and in the conference that Muhammad (may peace be upon him) held with his companions he suggested that the best way to tackle such a formidable

able force was to wait behind the walls of the city. The younger men, elated with the victory at Badr, clamoured to take the open field, a foolhardy course to which the Prophet gave way only with the greatest reluctance. He led his forces out of the city to Mount Uhud.

Uhud was a great pile of barren rock rising out of the desert without any growth of vegetation. In the glare of the desert it burnt like an oven, desolate of shade. The Muslim warriors were ordered to take up their position on the rising ground, which could be an advantage in defence, and the archers were ordered to take up positions on an adjoining mound behind the main position. They were given special instructions not to leave their places for any reason whatever, without definite orders from Muhammad himself.

The Meccan pagans, assisted by their womenfolk took up their stand on the plain below the hill, and so the two armies faced each other. Before the battle began the three hundred Jews, who had made common cause with the Muslims, deserted Muhammad, which greatly elated the Meccans who had already been superior in numbers. Further, encouraged by the songs of their women, they now challenged the Muslim champions to single combats. Talha, the hereditary standard bearer of the Qurishites came out and threw down the first challenge which was accepted by Ali who stepped out from the Muslim force and crossed swords with him. Thus without any preliminary the duel began, and as Ali's sword flashed in the sun, the head of Talha jumped from his shoulders and fell on the sand underneath. At this Talha's brother and other near relatives came out to fight duels, and each time Ali's sword succeeded in chopping off their heads. When the general battle followed Ali's sword "Dhulfakar" wrought such a tremendous havoc in the enemy ranks that the pagans began to take to their heels. Ali and Humza had broken through the enemy line and a Muslim victory seemed certain. The Muslim forces drove a wedge through the Meccan ranks but the Mus-

lim archers posted on the adjoining mound rashly left their places to join them in the pursuit of plunder, leaving a critical gap in Muhammad's defences and the Meccan general Khalid bin Walid, who had been waiting for just such an opportunity, wheeled his squadron round to occupy the place vacated by the Muslim archers. This changed the entire picture of the battle, the next phase of which went completely against the Muslims. The Holy Prophet's uncle Humza was killed as was the Muslim standard bearer Musab bin Omeir, who so much resembled the Holy Prophet in appearance. These tragic events turned the tables completely and now the Muslims began to flee before Khalid's lancers.

### **Ali's Heroism in the Battle**

At this point, when defeat for the Muslims looked like turning into a rout, when their Standard-Bearer was dead and there seemed no hope of rallying them, Ali hurled himself into the Fray, there encountering Sa'd bin Abi Talha, the standard bearer of the Meccans. One stroke of Ali's sword and Abu Sa'd fell on the ground, naked and defenceless. Pitying his sad plight, Ali left him unkilld, moving on to attack still more of the enemy with unflinching zeal. Shi'ite legends tell us that he killed several hundreds of them on that single day, and that the more he fought, the greater his strength became. When in one of these struggles Ali's sword was broken Muhammad (may peace be upon him) gave him his own sword, which Ali kept all his life. Ali's heroism caused the angels to sing in heaven "La Fata Illa Ali La Saif Illa "Dhufakar" (there is no better youth than Ali and no better sword than Dhulfakar).

### **Ali Nurses the Holy Prophet**

Muhammad (may peace be upon him) had remained in the rear, to direct operations when the Muslim soldiers were fighting in the front. He was practically

alone when a squad of the Meccan forces, led by Ibn Qami'a, attacked him. Mercifully his life was preserved but he was wounded. He lost two teeth, and the chain of his helmet cut so deep in his cheek that the loss of blood rendered him unconscious. Umar and Abu Bakr carried him from the ditch where he was lying to a nearby cleft in the rock, to be looked after.

When Ali heard that his master had been wounded, his first thought was for the well-being of the Holy Prophet. He took water to him in his shield and dressed his wounds, taking no heed of the wounds that he himself had sustained in battle. Assured that the Holy Prophet would recover he then returned to the Muslim forces who had been further demoralised by a rumour that the Holy Prophet was dead. Abu Sufyān, exploiting this lie to the full could be heard saying at the top of his voice, "We are well rid of him" to which Umar shouted in reply, "He is alive and ready to meet you at any time".

Heartened by this good news and encouraged by the return of Ali the Muslims now began to rally their scattered forces, with the result that the Quraishites did not seek to press their advantage any further. Instead of continuing to pursue the vanquished Muslims they turned round and went back to Mecca, greatly glorifying their god, Hubal, whom they held responsible for their overwhelming victory.

Meanwhile Muhammad repaired to the battlefield which was strewn with the corpses of the slain. He ordered that none of the corpses should be moved, but that martyr's tombs should be built on those very spots where they lay. The tomb exist until this day, commemorating a defeat that took place some 1350 years ago.

The Qur'an alludes to the battle of Uhud:—

"152. Allah verily made good His promise unto you when ye routed them by His leave, until (the moment) when your courage failed you

and ye disagreed about the order and ye disobeyed, after He had shown you that for which you long. Some of you desired the world, and some of you desired the Hereafter. Therefore. He made you flee from them, that He might try you. Yet now He hath forgiven you. Allah is a Lord of Kindness to believers.

153. When ye climbed (the hill) and paid no heed to any one, while the Apostle, in your rear, was calling you (to fight). Therefore He rewarded you grief for (his) grief that (He might teach) you not to sorrow either for that which ye missed or for that which befell you. Allah is informed of what you do.” (3:152—153)

Those Muslim soldiers that survived had learnt a bitter lesson. Yet they might still rejoice, for the Holy Prophet was still alive to lead them and Islam would not perish. The heroism of Ali had kept the remnants of the Muslim force together and when the Quraishite victors had departed from the field to go back to Mecca they had left behind a band of Muslims more determined than ever to preserve the way of God.

### **The Battle of Ditch. 627 A.D.**

In 627 A.D. Abu Sufyan again invaded the Muslim capital of Medina this time with an army of 10,000 strong. The Meccan forces consisted of the men of the Banu Ghatfan, the Jewish tribes of the Banu Nadir, and their confederates and the Bedouin nomads of the desert. With such odds, Abu Sufyan felt proud and confident of victory. He was sure that the moment he met the Muslim army he would annihilate them, root and branch. Muhammad (may peace be upon him) could muster only three thousand men and a cavalry of fifty ill-equipped horse, which left him no alternative but defence.

On the advice of his famous follower, the Persian, Salman, who was well acquainted with the conduct

of siege-warfare, the Holy Prophet agreed to dig a deep moat around the city of Medina, so wide that no enemy horse could leap across. The Muslims set to work, led by the Holy Prophet himself. Stripped to the waist, perspiring in the extreme heat, his hair flowing over his shoulders, Ali worked day and night at the digging, flexing his mighty muscles to the rhythm of the songs his fellow-workers sang as they toiled to complete the excavation in time. Behind this moat the Muslim army took up its position.

The moat proved well-nigh impregnable, defying for several days all attempts by Abu Sufyan to get horsemen across it. The Meccan leader seeing the impossibility of taking Medina by storm, looked for another way to secure victory and began negotiations with the Jewish tribe of the Banu Qureiza. He offered them large bribes to desert Muhammad and deliver the city from within, into the hands of the Meccans. This act of treachery would have placed Muhammad in a desperate position.

"While waiting for the Banu Qureiza," says Col Bodley,<sup>1</sup> "to make up their minds to deliver the city to him, Abu Sufyan had ordered a general assault on the moat. Three Quraishite warriors, Ikrima, the son of Abu Jahl, A'mr an uncle of Khadija and Naufal, who had been the leader of the famous caravan which Ibn Jahsh had attacked during the sacred month before the battle of Badr, had managed to jump their horses over a narrow part of the moat. They had been followed by a few others. It was a tense moment for Muhammad and his men and might have led to defeat. But before panic could spread, Ali and a group of swordsmen cut off the invaders, who thus found themselves trapped. Muhammad simultaneously rushed reinforcements to the danger point. There was a slight lull on both sides, broken by A'mr and his companions demanding the right to settle things by single combat."

1. Col. R.V.C. Bodley—*The Messenger*, p. 176-177. Publishers Orientalia, Lahore Edition, 1954.

"Ali immediately sprang forward and faced A'mr. When the old warrior saw who it was he laughed. He had known Ali since he was a baby and still considered him a child. But Ali was not afraid and flung himself at the Meccan, who had dismounted and waited, gorgeous in his armour, his white beard sweeping his cuirass. In spite of his advanced years, he had remained a redoubtable swordsman. This it did not take Ali long to realise, for strike as he might, agile and quick as he was, he never got anywhere near Amr. It looked as if he might be defeated. Soon he was being pressed back, parrying the blows which came with the rapidity of shafts of light. It looked like the end of the Lion of Arabia. But at the critical moment, when Ali was literally doing no more than protect his skin, A'mr thought he sensed an attack from the rear. He turned his head. It was only for a second, but enough for Ali. Darting forward, he came in low and, with a sweeping slash of his scimitar he cut off A'mr's leg. The venerable Quraishite stood for a moment, tottering on one foot, denouncing Ali and his family. Then, picking up the severed limb, he flung it at Ali with all his force. It was his last gesture. Ali was nearly stunned, but in a moment he had recovered and plunged his sword into A'mr.

In the meantime other duels had been taking place. Sa'd ibn Mu'ad had been wounded, and Naufal, in trying to retreat, had fallen in the moat. Az-Zubair another of Khadija's nephews, had jumped in after him and cut off his head. Ikrima had managed to get back to his side of the trench with a javelin wound. Some of the others had been killed, some had escaped. On the whole, therefore, what had been, so far, only hand to hand encounters in the battle for Medina had been a Muslim victory."

Abu Sufyan's greatly-desired alliance with the Jewish tribe of the Banu Qureiza did not in the end, materialise, owing to suspicion on both sides. Finally nature came to the help of the Muslims with drenching rain and

icy winds. The tent-fires of the Meccans were extinguished in the downpour and they were obliged to take sodden, uncooked food. Their morale was already low when a wild storm of wind ripped up their tents. Abu Sufyan ordered a retreat at the dead of night leaving behind him, as witnesses to his ignominious defeat a number of dead animals and a few flattened tents.

Once more Islam and Medina had been saved by the superior valour of Ali. The Holy Prophet is said to have remarked on this occasion, "al-Mubarazat Ali bin Abu Talib, A'mr ibn Ubdu Yomu'l Khandiq afzal-o-min amal'i Ummati'l Yoma'l Qayama." (Ali bin Abu Talib's duel with A'mr bin Ubdu, on the day of the Battle of the Ditch, surpasses the prayers of the believers that they would perform until the day of Resurrection.)

### **Operations against the Banu Qureiza**

The Jewish tribe of the Banu Qureiza had settled towards the eastern side of Medina in a fortified stronghold. By the Medina charter, which they had signed, they had entered into an offensive and defensive alliance with the Holy Prophet. We have seen that when the Muslims fought the battle of the Ditch, the men of the Banu Qureiza had entered into treasonable correspondence with Abu Sufyan, the Meccan invader. They had also rendered active help to the Meccans and they would have assisted in the massacre of the Muslims if information about their treachery had not reached the Holy Prophet in time.

After the departure of the Meccan army, Muhammad immediately laid siege to them, common sense warning him not to leave so dangerous an enemy at large in his midst. The siege lasted twenty five days. During this while, Ali, who was in command of the operations against the Qureiza, reduced them to such straits that starvation stared them in the face. He then led an assault on their stronghold, capturing it so

quickly that he was able to offer his afternoon prayers in the compound of the citadel. In the parley that followed, the Jewish leaders suggested that the arbitrator should be one of the chiefs of the Banu Aus, a tribe which had formerly been in alliance with the Banu Queriza. To this proposal the Holy Prophet magnanimously agreed and both parties finally selected Sa'd bin Ma'ad to hear the case and pronounce his judgment. After a formal trial Sa'd found the Jews guilty of high treason, and pronounced sentence on them accordingly. The men were put to death, while their women and children were to be taken as slaves. Ali was then entrusted with the duty of seeing to their execution.<sup>1</sup>

The Qur'an refers to this operation in Chapter XXXIII, where God says:

- "25. And Allah repulsed the disbelievers (the Meccan pagans) in their wrath; they gained no good. Allah averted their attack from the believers; and God sufficed the believers in fighting. Allah is ever Strong and Mighty.
- 26. And He drove down from their fortresses those of the followers of the Book (Jews) who supported them (the Meccan Pagans) and he cast awe in their hearts; some ye killed and others you took captive.
- 27. And He caused you to inherit their land and their houses and their wealth, and land that ye have not trodden. Allah is ever able to do all things." (Qur'an 33 : 25-27).

### **Operations against the Banu Mustalik, 627 A.D.**

In 627 A.D. the Jewish tribe of Mustalik entered into an offensive alliance with the neighbouring tribe of the Banu Khuz'za, both agreeing to make common

1. This verdict of Sa'd ibn Mu'ad has led European writers to levy the charge of blood-thirstiness against the Holy Prophet. How flimsy the foundation of such a charge is has been discussed in this author's work "The Arabian Prophet, his message and achievements."

cause against the Muslims. When the news of this unholy alliance reached the Holy Prophet's ears, he deputed his famous followers, Boreda, to make contact with the people of the Banu Mustalik and to send him all the information that he could collect. Boreda went to the headquarters of the Banu Mustalik, where he soon discovered that the tribe had hostile designs. The Holy Prophet then marched into the territory of the Banu Mustalik, at the head of an army, Ali accompanying him, as always, and bearing the standard. The Muslim army was able to advance far into the territory of the Banu Khuz'za without having to strike a single blow, for Ali's reputation as a warrior had preceded him, striking terror into the heart of the tribesmen who fled from the approaching "Lion" of the Muslims. Indeed all the warriors of the Banu Khuz'za deserted leaving the Banu Mustalik to face the army of the Holy Prophet on their own.

In the single combats that were fought as a preliminary to the general battle, Ali crossed swords with Quttada, the Jewish leader of the tribe, who was killed. After this the Jewish leader, Malik, confronted Ali, but he too was slain. After the death of Malik, his son came out to avenge his father's death, and met the same inevitable doom as his father. This disheartened the Jewish tribe. They laid down their arms and agreed to pay tribute.

### **Operation against the Banu Sad, 627 A.D. (Surya-i-Fidak)**

The same year saw Jewish conspiracies with the Banu Bakr and the Banu Sad. The Holy Prophet sent Ali on a punitive expedition which is sometimes referred to as the "Surya-i-Fidak" by the Arab writers, the term "Surya" being used to denote a Holy War in which the Holy Prophet did not participate in person, unlike "Ghazawat" which refers only to those campaigns that were led by the Holy Prophet himself.

On this occasion Ali was given a hundred men and deputed by Muhammad (may peace be upon him) to subdue Fidak. A series of forced marches, conducted at night to conceal his movements, quickly brought Ali within reach of the objective. The news that it was Ali who was their opponent struck such terror into the hearts of men of Fidak that they fled without giving a battle.

The chiefs of the Banu Sad waited upon Ali to seek forgiveness. A treaty was drawn up, by the terms of which Fidak was to be incorporated in the Muslim territory. The men of the Banu Sad further agreed to give Ali 100 camels and 2,000 sheep as tribute, for sale and distribution amongst the Muslim soldiers.

Fidak was later to become a bone of contention. The Holy Prophet is said to have given it to Ali in fief and it was claimed by Fatima, after her father's death. Abu Bakr, as Caliph, tried the case but dismissed it, holding that anything once owned by the Prophet must pass to the community as charity.

### **The Pilgrimage to Mecca 628 A.D.**

In the February of 628 A.D. Muhammad (may peace be upon him) decided to make the customary pilgrimage to Mecca. As the occasion was intended to be a peaceful one—a visit to the "House of God," such as he had not been able to make since the "Emigration" of six years before—the Holy Prophet decided to take no more than one thousand<sup>1</sup> men. All swords were to be sheathed and the wearing of armour of any kind was forbidden. Each man was to wear the two pieces of seamless white cloth that was the traditional garb of a pilgrim.

The pilgrims gathered outside Medina and their departure must have been an impressive sight as row upon row of unarmed warriors moved off, mounted on their tall camels, while behind them still more of the

1. Some authorities say 1500 went to this pilgrimage.

zealous followed on foot. At their head was Muhammad (may peace be upon him) riding his famous camel al-Quswa, the same animal on which he had left Mecca for Medina. At his side rode Abu Bakr, the Faithful; Umar, the Fiery, Uthman, the Peace-maker; and Ali, the Lion of God. Also in the front rank were Zaid and Bilal, the famous warriors of Uhud and the battle of Ditch. Bringing up the extreme rear were seventy riderless camels, garlanded and decorated and intended as sacrifices.

As a precautionary measure, Muhammad (may peace be upon him) had sent a scouting force ahead of them but the first stages of the journey passed without anxiety or incident. On reaching Dhul Huleifa, territory adjoining the holy territory of Mecca, the pilgrims burst into passionate utterance, proclaiming joyfully, "Lubbaik-Allahumma, lubbaik-Allahuma" (Here I am, O Lord). So indeed it seemed and the mood of optimism prevailed until they reached Hudaybiyah, about three miles from Mecca. Here they halted and made camp and here they received the news that Abu Sufyan had no intention of permitting them to enter Mecca unopposed. Khalid bin Walid and Ikrima bin Abu Jahl were waiting in readiness at the head of the Meccan cavalry.

Abu Sufyan now sent a message to the Holy Prophet in which this old enemy of Islam made it quite clear that he did not believe in the peaceful intentions of the pilgrims. He further recommended that the Prophet would do better to return home than to violate the sanctity of the holy month of pilgrimage by engaging in warfare.

The Holy Prophet did not want war; on the other hand he had no intention of returning to Medina without having completed the pilgrimage for which he and his followers yearned so much. Envoys were exchanged and Orwa, the son-in-law of Abu Sufyan was much impressed by what he saw of the Muslims. On his return to the Quraish he informed them that the Holy

Prophet was held in the greatest esteem by his followers and that in his majesty and awe he excelled all the emperors of the world. "Believe me" said he, "Muslims fight among themselves to get that cup of water in which Muhammad has dipped his finger. They long to drink it, sprinkle it on the wounds of the sick and disabled and hold everything sacred which has touched his body." Though much impressed by this report the Quraish were still loath to permit the entry of the Muslims into Mecca. Though virtually unarmed, the band of pilgrims represented to the Quraish the same army that had held them at bay at Badr, Uhud and the Battle of Ditch.

While Muhammad and his followers waited at Hudaybiyah the Quraish continued to hold council round the Ka'bah. Some were for driving Muhammad away by force, a few were in favour of allowing him to perform the pilgrimage, but the majority wanted to prevent him from entering the Ka'bah while still avoiding warfare. This led to a stalemate.

Muhammad (may peace be upon him) now sent his son-in-law, Uthman, to treat with Abu Sufyan. Uthman belonged to the family of Umayya to which Abu Sufyan also belonged, and thus was related to the hostile Quraish. It was hoped that kinship coupled with pacific intentions, might succeed in achieving a compromise. Negotiations continued for many days without the deadlock being broken. The Quraish remained adamant: under no circumstance would they allow Muhammad to enter Mecca.

### **The Pledge**

During these protracted discussions a rumour was noised abroad that Uthman had been killed by the Meccans. Greatly perturbed, the Holy Prophet gathered his followers together and asked them to pledge themselves to avenge Uthman's murder. One by one they came up to their master and there, under the shade

of a palm tree, they put their hand in his and took a solemn oath of renewed allegiance to the Holy Prophet.

Some little time later Uthman reappeared to announce the failure of his mission. With him was Soheil bin A'mr, an eminent citizen of Mecca whom the Meccan's had sent to negotiate a treaty with the Muslims.

Soheil bin Amr had been a persecutor of Muhammad from the very earliest days when the Holy Prophet had first begun publicly to preach Islam. He had fought against him at Badr where he had been taken prisoner and ransomed by Muhammad. Now he and the Holy Prophet were to meet again.

After a lengthy discussion Soheil and Muhammad managed to come to terms. These were to be embodied in a treaty which Soheil, as Meccan plenipotentiary was fully empowered to ratify. This was the treaty of Hudaibiyah.

### **The Treaty of Hudaibiyah**

As soon as the terms had been settled Muhammad called upon Ali to set them down in black and white, Muhammad started to dictate and, using the usual Muslim formula, he said:—

“In the name of God, these are the conditions of agreement between Muhammad, the Apostle of God and——”

Immediately Soheil objected to the preamble and refusing to acknowledge Muhammad as Prophet said angrily, “Had I taken you as God's apostle, I would never have fought against you. It is not an opportune moment to raise this controversial point. It would be better to write in the usual Arab fashion—your name and that of your father's.

At this a murmur arose from the Muslim pilgrims who had been eagerly following the discussion, but the Holy Prophet calmly asked Ali to erase the clause “Prophet of God” to which objection had been taken

by the other party. The hot tempered Ali could not bring himself to do this and, greatly enraged by Soheil, said, "I swear by the Almighty God that I will not delete it." The Holy Prophet then rubbed out these words himself. The rest of the document was quickly completed and Ali was ordered to make a duplicate copy of it. Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman signed it as witnesses for the Muslim side, and Huweytib-ibn Abd-al-Ozza and Mirqraz ibn Hafs put down their signatures for the Meccan side. A note to the effect that the treaty had been transcribed by Ali was added at the end of the deed, and a clay seal was fixed to it.

By the terms of the treaty it was agreed that the Muslims should return immediately to Medina but that they could perform the pilgrimage the following year. During the period the Meccans would evacuate the city for three days and camp outside its walls. The Muslims would come unarmed, save for a sword each, which they could carry for self-defence. It was further agreed that a ten years truce would be made between the Meccans and the Muslims. During this period the Muslims guaranteed to let the Meccan caravans pass without let or hindrance through their territory. It was also agreed that any Meccan who escaped to Medina to accept Islam would be handed back to the Meccans.

For the time being warfare was avoided and peace prevailed. Turning their backs on Mecca, the Muslim pilgrims returned to Medina, there to find themselves once more threatened, this time, by their implacable enemies—the Jews.

### **The Conquest of Khyber 628. A.D.**

This time it was the Jews of Khyber who constituted a serious threat to the power of the Muslims. The name "Khyber", literally meaning "a fortified place", was given to one of the most fertile of the desert oases and its great gardens of date palms were most jealously

guarded by the various Jewish tribes whose territory it was. To Khyber had also come Jews from the vanquished Banu Mustalik, Banu Nadir, Banu Qainuqu and Banu Qureiza, who had decided to settle in this lovely spot after their expulsion by Muhammad (may peace be upon him). These "Refugees" had immediately begun to incite their brother Jews to rise against the Holy Prophet and a coalition had been formed with the neighbouring Arab tribes of the Banu Ghatafan, Banu Fizara and the Bedouines of the desert.

These Arabs were the flower of the men of Judea, warriors who had made a great name for themselves in the annals of the Arabian peninsula for their prowess and leadership in war. They represented a most powerful challenge to the supremacy of Islam. As it happened, nothing much came of the alliance for, at the approach of the Muslim forces, the Banu Ghatafan and Banu Fizara, fearing a flanking movement by the Muslims, decided to remove their flocks and herds to the safety of their own settlements. They went back to their homes and left the Jews alone to bear the brunt of the war that they themselves had instigated.

The Khyber, which was situated at a distance of four or five day's journey, (about a hundred miles) to the North East of Medina was defended by a series of fortresses of which the chief, al-Qamus, was considered to be impregnable. Not only was al-Qamus situated on an inaccessible rock, but its walls were built from the rock itself.

Using battering rams made of palm trees, the Muslims quickly subdued the smaller forts or starved their inhabitants into surrender. Finally only al-Qamus remained. Abu Bakr led a heroic attack on it, only to be repulsed. The fiery Umar also tried to capture it, but he too was driven back, losing most of his men. One after another the boldest warriors of Islam tried to breach the mighty walls but none seemed able to make the slightest impression on them. Muhammad (may peace be upon him) became greatly

perturbed at the effect these continued rebuffs might have on the morale of his soldiers.

Realising that a prolonged siege resulting in a still uncaptured fort would also lower the prestige and the glory of Muslim arms throughout Arabia the Holy Prophet resolved on a last desperate attack. To his forces he made the following announcement:—

“Tomorrow will I entrust the flag of Islam to a warrior whose tried valour has repeatedly proved that he never quits the field unsuccessfully, and who undoubtedly is a personality who loves God and His Apostle, and in return is loved by them.” This announcement caused a great deal of excited expectation in the Muslim ranks, every warrior in faith being curious to know who that person was, and praying that the honour might fall to him. Each hoped fervently that, at dawn next day, fortune would fall upon him, that it was he who would turn out to be the person hailed as the friend of God and of his Apostle. The bitterness of past defeats was forgotten in a fever of hope and expectation. The whole army was keyed up to battle pitch and had never been more anxious to fight. Morale was completely restored.

### **Ali is Chosen to head the Assault against al-Qamus.**

Daybreak saw the Muslim forces drawn up and in full battle array. A great hush fell over the warriors as Muhammad made ready to deliver the pronouncement. Into a pin-drop silence was announced the name of Ali, but Ali did not come forward. Heads turned to look for him but the “Lion of God” was lying sick in his tent.

Illness, however, could not prevent Ali from obeying the summons of his beloved Master. As soon as the news of the Prophet's choice was brought to him, he rose, put on his armour and presented himself to the Holy Prophet. “What ails thee?” asked the Holy Prophet. “I cannot look neither directly to the right

nor to the left" was the answer, "because of the sickness of my eyes."

Tradition has it that the Holy Prophet applied some saliva from his mouth to the affected eyes and that Ali, instantly cured, became fit to fight again. The Apostle of God then presented Ali with the banner of Islam and ordered him to lead the assault. When the Jewish leaders received intelligence that Ali was to command the Muslim forces, they consulted their astrologers, one of whom predicted, "Verily Moses is coming to cross arms with Pharaoh". The following graphic description by Col. Bodley<sup>1</sup> of the part played by Ali in the ensuing battle shows how well-founded the Jewish fears were:—

"Finally Ali went up against the wall, bearing the black standard. As he charged, he chanted:

"I am Ali the lion, and like a lion howling in the wilderness I weigh my foes in the giant's balance."

Ali was no giant, but he made up for his lack of height by his great breadth and prodigious strength. Today he was formidable in a scarlet tunic over which he wore his shining breastplate and backplate. On his head gleamed a spiked helmet encrusted with silver. In his right hand he brandished Muhammad's own scimitar, "Dhulfikar" which had been entrusted to him with the black banner.

Again and again Jewish veterans rushed at Ali. Again and again they staggered away with limbs or heads severed. Ali is said to have killed six renowned heroes of the Jews in single combat namely (1) Harith the younger brother of Marhab, (2) Dauod ibn Qabus of the Banu Bakr tribe, (3) Rabi bin Abi-ul-Haqiq, Aunter the brave, (4) Murrah ibn Merwan, (5) Yasir Khaybree and (6) Duhajeej Khybree. Finally the champion of all the Hebrews, a man called Marhab, who towered above the other warriors, planted himself before Ali. He wore a double cuirass, and round his

<sup>1</sup>. Col. R.V.C. Bodley—*The Messenger*. P. 231. Publishers Orientalia, Lahore. Ed. 1954.

helmet was a thick turban held in place by an enormous diamond. He was girt with a golden belt from which swung two swords. He did not use these, however, and killed right and left with a long three-pronged spear. For a moment the battle paused and the combatants rested on their arms to watch the duel.

Marhab, like Goliath of Goath, had never been defeated. His size alone frightened opponents before they came close to him. His barbed fork disheartened the most skilled swordsmen.

Marhab attacked first, driving at Ali with his trident. For a moment Ali, unaccustomed to this form of weapon, gave ground. Then he steadied himself and fenced with the Hebrew. A feint and a parry sent the spear flying. Before Marhab could draw one of his swords, Ali's scimitar had cloven his head through his helmet and turban so that it fell on either side of his shoulders.

The Jews, seeing their champion dead, retreated into the city. The Prophet gave the signal for a general assault. The Muslims surged forward. Ali led the onslaught. He had lost his shield during the duel and, to replace it, had torn a door from its hinges, which he now carried before him. But he had little need for it now. With the Muslims pouring through the breach like a torrent in flood, the inhabitants took refuge in their homes. Those who did not surrender were massacred."

### **The Results of the Victory**

The victory at al-Qamus<sup>1</sup> was complete and Ali,

1. Amongst the prisoners taken at al-Qamus was the famous Safiya, the daughter of the ruler of Banu Qureiza, who had died in the execution after the battle of Ditch. With his usual clemency the Holy Prophet set her free. She accepted Islam and married the Holy Prophet.

It was after this victory, too that the Holy Prophet accepted the hospitality of the treacherous Jewess, Zaynab. The father, uncle, brother and husband of Zaynab had all died in the battle and, actuated by powerful motives of revenge, the Jewess gave a banquet for the victors at which she served a poisoned kid. The Holy Prophet took only one mouthful, which he quickly spat out, but so deadly was the poison that it nevertheless permeated his system, eventually, it is held, becoming the cause of his death.

emerging as the conqueror of Khyber, was a hero without parallel in Islam. The carnage had established such awe in the hearts of the enemy that people trembled at the very mention of his name. The Muslims celebrated the victory by putting flaming lamps on the roofs of their houses. In the Holy Qur'an the following revelation refers thus to the occasion:—

“18. But Certainly God was well pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to thee under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquility on them and rewarded them with a near victory.”  
(Qur'an 48:18)

### **The Massacre of the Banu Khuz'a**

With all the tribes in and around Medina now in awe of the Muslims, the Holy Prophet might have hoped for a peaceful year to come, but the Meccans had no intention of keeping to the terms of the treaty of Hudaibiyah. As the first year of the treaty drew to a close the Meccan Quraish violated it in a most ruthless manner. At their direct instigation the tribe of the Banu Bakr invaded and pillaged the territory of the Banu Khuz'za, who had recently entered into an alliance with Muhammad. Those of the Banu Khuz'za who had escaped the massacre fled to Medina and sought Muhammad's help and a redress of their grievance. The Holy Prophet came to the conclusion that the time to put an end to the reign of iniquity and oppression that prevailed at Mecca was long overdue. Forthwith he ordered an army of ten thousand to get ready to take the field against the Meccans. It was at this juncture that Abu Sufyan, the governor of Mecca, realising the gravity of the danger that lay ahead, came to Medina and Sought the Prophet's forgiveness, but in vain.

### **Muhammad (may peace be upon him) Leads the Army to Mecca.**

Once more Muhammad took the road to Mecca but this time it was at the head of a fully-equipped army, ten thousand strong. Halfway between Medina and Mecca, the Holy Prophet met his uncle, Abbas, who was in the process of emigrating to Medina with his family. Then and there they professed Islam and, as they entered the fold, the Holy Prophet remarked, "You are the last of the "Emigrants" as I am last of the Prophets". Abbas then accompanied the Prophet back to Mecca.

The Muslim army continued its unopposed march to Man Azzahran, within sight of Mecca. Here they were ordered to make camp and to wait developments and here Muhammad received a visit from Abu Sufyan for the second time. Realising that Islam could no longer be prevented from spreading, the wily leader of the Meccans sought to save his skin by a profession of faith. "His conversion to Islam" says the Shi'ite tradition "was lukewarm" and undertaken from purely secular motives of self-aggrandisement. When asked if he believed in the Apostleship of Muhammad, he replied, "I still have grave doubts," which is why the Shi'ite chronicles call Abu Sufyan, the Judas Iscariot of Islam, a believer by lip service only, one who adopted the faith from policy rather than from conviction.

### **The Bloodless Occupation of Mecca.**

"In the meanwhile" says Col. Bodley,<sup>1</sup> "Muhammad had dressed and armed himself as if for battle. Wearing a scarlet tunic, over which gleamed his cuirass, he had on his head a spiked helmet around which was bound his black turban. Except for his sword he was unarmed. Mounting on al-Quswa, which knelt before his tent, he rode out to review his troops. Before the

1. Col. R.V.C. Bodley—*The Messenger*- p. 251.

march past began, he handed to Ali the great banner which he had already carried so bravely at Khyber.

In spite of Abu Sufyan's declaration of faith, Muhammad did not trust him any more than at the time of Uhud. He consequently did not expose his army to any surprise move on the part of the Meccans. In fact he caused his forces to surround the city and enter from four different points.

From the south Khalid led the cavalry of the allied Bedouine tribes: from the north came another group of nomads, these on camels, under az-Zubair, from the west the Medinites under Sa'd ibn Obayda and from the east Abu Ubaydah at the head of the veteran refugees. Behind this last contingent rode Muhammad with his staff, supported by Ali in command of the black armoured lancers which had so impressed Abu Sufyan."

The regiments and battalions moved off as ordered and entered the city. Except for a slight skirmish with Khalid ibn Walid in which 2 Muslims and 28 Meccans were killed, the occupation of Mecca was bloodless. Muhammad took up his stand on a raised mound a little below the cemetery where Khadija and Abu Talib were buried. From here he could watch the progress of operations and here he remained until the occupation of the city was complete.

### **The Great Purge**

Muhammad now changed his uniform for the seamless dress of a pilgrim. Accompanied by Ali he rode to the Kab'ah, entered it and began what is known as the Great Purge. In this puritannical mission Ali was the Holy Prophet's right hand man, zealously assisting him in his task of breaking the idols and sharing with him a passionate desire to eradicate all the traces of idolatry and ancient practices that were desecrating "the House of God".

The Meccans looked on aghast while the Holy Prophet, with a stroke of stick held in his hand, broke

the idols which lay in the lower cavities of the walls. Above the uproar which the shattering of idols brought, the Holy Prophet's voice could be heard reciting the Quranic verse of the XVII Sura, "Truth is come and falsehood is vanished. Verily falsehood is a thing which is bound to disappear." To break those idols which were placed higher up, out of reach of either hand or stick, (in particular the idol most treasured by the Meccans, that of Hubal, their famous god of war), the Holy Prophet solicited the help of Ali. "Ascend on my shoulders and then shatter with this stick all the idols which are placed up above", said the Apostle of God. Thinking it an impertinence to get up on the Holy Prophet's shoulders, Ali hesitated for a moment. "Do as you are told" reiterated the voice of the master. Ali then got up on the Holy Prophet's shoulders and completed the Great Purge. He threw down all the idols, relics of "the Age of Ignorance", and then jumped from the shoulders of his master.

### **The Shi'ite Interpretation of the Great Purge**

The Shi'ite traditions somewhat exaggerate the significance of Ali's role in the Great Purge, asserting that while standing on the shoulders of the Holy Prophet, Ali's feet were covering the marks of the seal of Prophethood which God had stamped on them. Thus in the performance of a divine duty Ali was sharing the burden of a divinely ordained Apostolate. They narrate that when Ali had jumped from the shoulders of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) to the ground, he smiled, and being asked what was the cause of it replied to the Holy Prophet, "I descended from this great height and yet I received no hurt." The Holy Prophet then said, "How could you receive any hurt when the one who ordered you to ascend was the last of the Prophets, and the one who ordered you to descend was no less a person than the angel Gabriel?" Another tradition says that after the performance of the

great purge, when Ali descended from the Holy Prophet's shoulders, the latter asked "How did you fare when you were mounting my shoulders"? To this Ali replied, "While there I found that my hand reached to a height as high as Heaven, and that I could remove whatever I wanted with ease." The Holy Prophet replied, "O Ali! I congratulate you on performing a divine duty, and lucky I am indeed that I held the divine burden on my shoulders." In short these traditions make out that the Holy Prophet's order to Ali to ascend his shoulders was nothing short of a divine revelation which was expressly meant to signify that Ali was co-sharer in this divinely ordained affair.

### **Insurrection at Tayef**

The occupation of Mecca by Muhammad (may peace be upon him) did not bring the rest of Arabia under his sway. Foremost of the cities that held out against him was the city of Tayef, which was inhabited by the powerful tribe of Hawazin — people with whom Muhammad (may peace be upon him) had sought to take refuge some two years before the "Hijra" when he was persecuted by the Meccan Qureish. They had rejected him and turned him out of their territory, and had pelted him with stones. Ever jealous of their liberty, they defied Muhammad's authority. Calling all the tribes of the Bedouines, the Thakif and others who pastured their flocks on their territory, they formed a formidable league, and decided to overwhelm the rising Muslim power before it had had time to challenge their authority. They mobilised levies to offer armed resistance to the Muslims. The Muslim intelligence, ever vigilant, informed the Holy Prophet of these nefarious intentions.

### **The Battle of Huniyan**

In February 630 A.D. Muhammad accompanied by

Ali and other companions, led an army of 12,000 strong against them. In order to reach the fertile valley of Tayef, they had to pass through a narrow defile called Huniyan, situated some ten miles from the north east of Mecca. It was a narrow and dismal place, leaving little room for an army to pass through, except in single file. Nor could camels and horses be manoeuvred within its narrow walls. Concealing themselves under the precipitous side of the rocky galley, the tribesmen from the hills showered avalanches of rocks and arrows on the Muslims. Like the narrow track (about twelve yards wide) of Thermopylae in Greece, where the Spartan king, Leonidas, with a force of three hundred soldiers defied for many hours the mighty Persian army of Xerxes, Huniyan prevented all attempts by the Muslim cavalry to organise a charge. Panic began to spread amongst the Muslim troops and another defeat like that of Uhud seemed inevitable.

### **Ali Rallies the Muslim Forces**

At this critical moment Ali is said to have rallied the disorganised forces around him, inspiring them to fight with fresh fury. Riding at their head and flourishing his sword, Ali pressed back the enemy by the sheer weight of numbers, driving them out of the defile and into the open valley, where he inflicted a crushing defeat on them. The defeat turned into a rout, the rout into as bloody massacre and Ali who had killed the commander of the enemy in a hand to hand fight, soon became aware that the enemy was anxious<sup>1</sup> to surrender.

As a result of this victory enormous booty fell into Muslim hands. The battle of Huniyan, one of the most famous episodes in the history of Islam, was notable not only for the valour of the Muslim troops but also for the clemency, with which, after the battle was over, the prisoners were treated. Six hundred of the enemy were freed without having to pay ransom.

2. Ibn Hisham—*Sirat*. Vol. II. p. 267.

Huniyan is commemorated in Chapter IX of the Qur'an where we read:

"25. God did surely help you in many battlefields and on the day of Huniyan, when you prided yourself on your numbers, it availed you nothing. The earth with all its breadth became too strait for you. So you turned your backs in flight.

26. Then God sent down His tranquility upon His Apostle and upon the believers and sent down hosts which you did not see, and chastised those who disbelieved, and that is the reward of the unbelievers."

(Qur'an 9:25-26)

### **Ali as Governor of Medina**

In each of the "Ghazawats" to date, Ali had proved himself the most valuable of all warriors in the field. He was now to be entrusted by the Holy Prophet with a task of a very different kind the governorship of Medina.

In 631 A.D. news reached the ears of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) that the Roman Emperor, Heraclius had reached Syria and that, elated by his previous triumphs over the Persians, was now contemplating the invasion of Arabia. His feudatories had already been ordered to raise troops for the campaign. Alarmed at the news, the Holy Prophet hastily summoned levies from the length and breadth of Arabia to repel the threatened invasion. The impending war could only be financed by voluntary contributions and through the generosity of Muslim men and women, who freely contributed to the expedition, the Holy Prophet collected a large army which he led to Tabuk. It was his intention to meet the Romans on the frontier and so prevent them from entering Arabia.

Before leaving for Tabuk, Muhammad (may peace

be upon him) appointed Ali as his representative there. Besides commanding the Medina garrison Ali was to officiate at Prayers and to perform all those duties that had hitherto devolved on the Holy Prophet. In addition to maintaining law and order in the country he was also required to look after the Prophet's household, a duty which more than all others epitomised the love and trust in which he was held by his master.

Rumours began to circulate, however, to the effect, that Ali had been deliberately left behind the Holy Prophet because he had been apprehensive about the dangers of the Tabuk expedition. These slanders on Ali's character had been started by one of the leaders of the "Hypocrites" Abdullah ibn Ubay, an old enemy of Islam from the days of Badr. He was now quick to seize upon the absence of Muhammad as an opportunity to spread dissension amongst Muslims.

To a man of Ali's bold and fiery nature accusations of cowardice were more than could be borne. Greatly incensed, he mounted his camel and rode after the Holy Prophet, overtaking him on the road to Tabuk and telling him of the lies that were in everyone's mouth. Muhammad managed to pacify Ali by telling him that he had wanted a member of his own household to be the one to look after his family. He also explained that although Abu Sufyan had embraced Islam the dangers of an intrigue at Medina were still so great that only a tried veteran would be able to curb the mischievous designs of the enemy still within the city.

The immediate effect of the Holy Prophet's words was to send Ali hot-foot back to Medina where he sought out the house of Abdullah bin Ubay and, dragging him outside, and proceeded to give him a bit of his mind. Though the Holy Prophet had been lenient in his dealings with the Hypocrites he (Ali) was made of different mettle. He believed in harsher measures and he made it abundantly clear that, as long as he was in charge of affairs in Medina, he would neither brook any insult nor endure any form of intimidation.

**Shi'ite Interpretation of Ali's Governorship**

According to the Shi'ite traditions the words that Muhammad (may peace be upon him) had used to pacify Ali had been as follow:—

“I have appointed thee as my Vicegerent (Caliph) and left thee in my stead. Return then to thy post, and be my deputy over mine people and thine. O Ali! Art thou not content that thou art to me what Aaron was to Moses?”

From these words the Shi'ites have further deduced that Ali's stay in Medina was symbolic of his designation as the Holy Prophet's successor.

The Governorship of Medina may therefore be regarded as one of the turning-point in Ali's life. Behind him were his triumphs on the battlefield in the many Ghazawat" in which he had fought so valorously and so decisively. Ahead lay still more battles, not all of them to be conducted in the field. The intrigues of Abdullah ibn Ubbay at Medina were but the fore-runners of many hard years of political strife to come. Time and again Ali would be obliged to set aside his personal wishes and, in the path of duty, Ali the warrior would be required to yield to the prior demands made on him in the role of Ali the Ruler.

## CHAPTER V

ALI AND THE PROPAGATION  
OF ISLAM**Operation against the People of al-Tayef**

After the battle of Hunyian one of the vanquished pagan leaders, Malik ibn Auf, fled to Tayef where he was given asylum. The people of Tayef were formidable warriors who worshipped an idol called Allat, to which they attributed their military success. The holy Prophet realised that if he could destroy this idol it would demonstrate to other tribes how futile it was to worship images and he therefore decided to send a Muslim force to lay siege to the Tayefites.

The proud and valorous men of Tayef, having resolved to fight to a finish fought desperately to the mass assault of the Muslims, they replied with massed counter assaults, until the casualties on the Muslim side began to pile up. When the Muslim force laid waste their vineyards and date palms they displayed the most obstinate resistance refusing to be starved into surrender.

Finally Muhammad (may peace be upon him) decided to send Ali to Tayef with an invitation to its people to accept Islam. On his arrival in the territories bordering on Tayef, Ali began to destroy the idols in the temples which he came upon. This greatly incensed the local tribesmen, men of the Banu Khusham, who were feudatories of the Tayefites. In a skirmish with them

1. Abu Sufyan, now fighting with the Muslim, after his acceptance of Islam, lost one eye in one of these encounters.

Ali killed their formidable leader, Shahab. This caused panic amongst the forces of the Banu Khusham, who surrendered. Other feudatories of Tayef — the men of Hawazan and the Banu Thakeef — were also quickly reduced by Ali, who marched on to Tayef to find its people now anxious to surrender. A deputation of people from Tayef then went to the Holy Prophet to pray for forgiveness and to ask permission to enter the Islamic fold.

The deputation asked the Holy Prophet to give them a short respite for the continued worship of their idols, begging first for one year's grace then for six months and, finally, for just one month's grace. To the Holy Prophet idols and Islam ran counter to each other, and he rejected their offer most emphatically. "Then" said they, "Exempt us from the five daily prayers". Muhammad replied, "Faith without prayers is nothing". As a last appeal, they begged "Give us exemption from Zakat (the obligatory tax)". The Holy Prophet then lost his temper, and in great wrath, said, "You have to observe the prayers, the fasting, and to pay the obligatory tax if you accept Islam. And should you deviate a hair's breadth from the commands of God, I will send you a man, who is like me in all respects and he will put you to the sword and ignominious will be your lot. "Then the Holy Prophet caught hold of Ali's hand and said, "Verily he is the man who will do this job."

### **Ali's Secret Conference with the Holy Prophet**

The Shi'ite traditions say that Ali went immediately to the Holy Prophet on his return from Tayef and that the two had a conference the deliberations of which were completely secret. Some time later one of the companions asked Muhammad (may peace be upon him) what were the confidential secrets that he had discussed with Ali, receiving the reply "*Untujtut wa laken Allah Untujah* (I do not say anything from my self but whatever God tells me to convey to him). This is inter-

preted as passing on mystical spiritualism to Ali (Tarikhul Anbiya page 397 and Rousa-tu-Safa Vol. II page 138.)

"This secret" say the Shia chroniclers, "Whatever it may have been, once again established the superiority of Ali, in as much as he was the depository of those divine hidden things which the Holy Prophet dare not tell to any one else."

It was while Ali was engaged in this secret conference with Muhammad that the deputation from Tayef is said to have arrived.

### **Operations against Banu Tay (Spring 630 A.D.)**

Another refractory tribe, the Banu Tay, was now instigated by its idolatrous priesthood to defy Muhammad's authority. One of the chiefs of this famous tribe was the illustrious Hatim, whose prodigious achievements had passed into the classics of oriental literature. Poets and minstrels had sung the tales of Hatim's generosity and munificence. Like Mercury the legendary god of Greek literature, Hatim's romantic tales fill the pages of the oriental books to which the people revert for pastime and pleasure. Hatim had died some little time before the present insurrection but when the leadership of the tribe fell on his son Adi, the men of Banu Tay had a chief who equalled his father in the performance of humane deeds. Adi was deeply religious, going every day to the temple to worship the ancient idols, the chief of which "Phyllis" was a superbly made work of art and held in the greatest veneration by Adi, who daily asked his blessings in his prayers.

As a warrior, however, Adi proved lacking in courage for when the Holy Prophet despatched a force under Ali to reduce the rebels, Adi fled to Syria as soon as the Muslim army came near his territory, leaving his sister Sufana and his clansmen to their fate. Ali took them prisoner and sent them to Medina where the Prophet set Sufana at liberty. She refused however to accept

her freedom, saying, "O Apostle of God! My father is dead, and when your army approached, my brother and other relations took to flight to save their skins. My father was an illustrious chief and was famous for his munificence. He used to ransom prisoners, fed the poor and needy, protected the honour of women, and consoled the sick and the afflicted. I am the daughter of that prince who would never have<sup>1</sup> accepted liberty unless the men of his tribe were also set free." "O young lady" said the Holy Prophet, "your father undoubtedly had all the virtues of a Muslim. I accede to your request, and set all your tribesmen free. If I could ask the blessings of God on any non-Muslim whose life had been passed in idolatry, I would invoke God's mercy on your father's soul." Bestowing precious gifts on Hatim's daughter the Holy Prophet dismissed her with honour.

Sufana went to Syria, where she met her brother and told him of the generous treatment that had been meted out to her. Adi then hastened to Medina, threw himself at the feet of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) and accepted Islam. This was the signal for the rest of his clan to follow his example. In the subsequent wars of Islam the people of Tay remained steadfast to the faith and rendered active and loyal services to the cause of Islam.

### **The Christians of Najran Propose a "Mubahila"**

By the year 631 A.D. Islam was firmly established throughout Arabia. Most of the Bedouine tribes had offered allegiance to the Holy Prophet or shown themselves anxious to align themselves with the Islamic community. Those Jewish tribes which had not become confederates had been vanquished and dispersed and one, at least, of the Christian tribes had accepted Islam after the Tabuk expedition, the Christian chief of Aylah having concluded a treaty with the Holy Prophet.

1. The famous Persian poet, Saddi, immortalised this episode in the beautiful verses in his famous work "Bostan".

There remained, however, many isolated pockets of resistance and Muhammad next turned his attention to the large Christian community of Najran, inviting them to accept Islam. Their response was to challenge the Holy Prophet to conduct a "Mubahila".

The 'Mubahila' was an old custom much used by the ancient prophets. Each of the disputant parties was required to swear a solemn oath that they were on the side of Right and Truth, calling on God to wreak His vengeance on them if they lied. The liar, it was supposed, would then be visited by the wrath of God, ultimately to perish.

### **The Christian Deputation arrives in Medina**

In the month of Dhil Haj, in 631 A.D., a deputation of Christian priests, headed by 'Aqub. Syed and Abdul Harriith, duly arrived in Medina. Dressed in silken robes and wearing golden rings on their fingers, they made their way to the Mosque to see the Holy Prophet. There they saluted him but got no answer. Greatly puzzled they left the Mosque and, meeting Uthman, complained to him, "Your Prophet has invited us to come for a mutual discussion on religion. When we went to see him he turned his head aside and did not have the courtesy to respond to our greetings. We wanted to talk to him, but he buttoned his lips. This is an enigma to all of us. Can you throw any light on the matter and advise us what to do? Should we go back to our country or stay here?" Uthman took them to Ali, who advised them to change their silken garments for the cotton and wollen dress of the priest and to take off the golden rings, then see the Prophet again.

Having changed into cotton robes, they revisited the Holy Prophet who now welcomed them and made them sit near him, and said, "I swear by the Lord, when you came first Satan accompanied you with your finery and jewellery. Since you have come now (clean in body) I invite you to follow Islam. Then they said to

him "let us know what opinion you hold about Jesus Christ." The Holy Prophet said, "Permit me to ask you to stay with us for today. I will answer your query tomorrow." The Holy Prophet then waited for a revelation and received the following command of God, which forms part of Surah III of the Holy Qur'an:-

58. This which We recite unto thee is a revelation and a wise reminder.
  59. Lo! The likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Ađam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! and He is.
  60. (This is) the truth from thy Lord (O Muhammad) so be not thou of those who waver.
  61. And whoso disputeth with thee concerning him after the knowledge which has come unto thee, say (unto him) Come! We will summon our sons, and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, then we will pray humbly (to our Lord) and (solemnly) invoke the curse of Allah upon those who lie.
  62. Lo! This verily is the narrative. There is no God save Allah and Lo! Allah, He verily is, the Mighty, the Wise.
  63. And if they turn away, then Lo! Allah is aware of (who are) the corrupters.
- (The Qur'an 3:58-63)

When the Holy Prophet had informed the deputation of what had been revealed to him by God, he again invited them to accept Islam. As they did not believe his words, he then challenged them to conduct, the "Mubahila", to invoke the curse of God on the liar. The Christians accepted the challenge but when they saw how, not only Muhammad but his daughter Fatima, his son-in-law and his grandsons, Hasan and Hussain, (styled as the Holy "Punj-Tun", or the blessed "Quincunx") also came out to take the oath, they were dismayed and overwhelmed. "Verily I see a divine

light on the face of our combatants," said the leader of the deputation to his fellow-priests. "Truth shines in their eyes, I think that should they pray for anything, God would hearken to their solicitations, and even change the places of the mountains if they asked it. I sincerely advise you to refrain from the proposed "Mubahila". To invoke the curse of God with people like these is to invite sure death."

Having thus changed their minds, they went to the Holy Prophet and informed him of their inability to proceed with the Mubahila. The Holy Prophet then again extended to them the invitation to accept Islam. The Christians replied, "We have have not the conviction of professing your faith, nor the strength to fight with you. Let us make a compromise and come to terms." At last a treaty was signed by which the Christians agreed to pay annual tribute to the Muslims besides (1) two thousand garments of the value of 40 dirhems each, (2) thirty camels and thirty horses, (3) thirty coats of arm, and (4) thirty lances, every year.

### **The Significance of the "Mubahila in the Shi'ite Traditions**

The Shi'ite traditions on this "Mubahila" attach great importance to the fact that Ali was chosen by the Holy Prophet to challenge the Christians on this occasion with a confession of his faith. To the Shias it can only be because of the unexampled chastity and purity of Ali and his family that they were selected for this honour out of the entire community of the Muslims, and this had become symbolic of the virtue that was ever to be maintained in the house of Ali, a house which was to give rise to the line of the Holy Imams or spiritual leaders.

### **Ali reads the Qur'anic verses at Mecca**

The triumphal entry of the Muslims into Mecca in 630 A.D. had marked the end of all opposition to their

making the annual pilgrimage, while the breaking of the idols by Muhammad (may peace be upon him) had made clear to all that the Kab'ah henceforward was the holy place of the Islamic faith. On his return from Tabuk, the Holy Prophet appointed Abu Bakr as "Amir-i-Hajj" or the leader of the pilgrims, sending him to Mecca at the head of a large band of the Faithful. While Abu Bakr was away in Mecca on this pilgrimage the Holy Prophet received the divine revelation of the Sura, "Al-Bara'at", (the Immunity), which he read out to the Medinite congregation. Thinking of their brothers in faith, who were unable to hear these divine commandments because of their absence, some people said that, if only the revelation had come earlier, Abu Bakr could have read it to the pilgrims in Mecca. To this the Holy Prophet is said to have replied, "Only a member of my family, as my representative, can have the prerogative to read and announce it."

That "member of my family" proved to be Ali, who was sent forthwith to Mecca to read the proclamation to the vast multitude of Arab tribesmen who had come from every part of Arabia to perform the pilgrimage. Some of them were devout Muslims, some were still pagans, others had accepted Islam but were still wavering and uncertain in their faith. Ali chose the "Aqumal-Hadi", the Day of Great Sacrifice for reading of the new revelations and is said to have performed this task superbly well. Speaking as the representative of the Holy Prophet, he gave the congregation the Divine commandments which now form a major part of Chapter IX of the Holy Qur'an.

The three main points in the Declaration were as follows:—

- (1) Henceforward the Muslims were to consider themselves immune from all obligations towards those idolatrous tribes who had repeatedly broken their pledges after entering into treaties with the Muslims.

- (2) No heathen polytheists were to be allowed to enter the sacred precincts of the Kab'ah. Also definite rules for the circumambulation of the Kab'ah were made.

No idolater shall, after this year, perform the pilgrimage, neither shall any one be permitted to make the circuit around the Kab'ah naked, in a state of nature. If any one (tribe or an individual) has a treaty with the Holy Prophet, it will remain in force till its termination. A period of four months is herewith allowed to the rest of people to return to their territories, after which the Holy Prophet will think himself immune from any obligation whatsoever that remains on his part.

- (3) Laws were also promulgated ensuring the Muslims entrance into paradise. The concluding sections of the Sura define what marks the faithful and what is expected of them, and emphasize the necessity for the faithful to contribute men and money for the propagation of Islam.

### **The Far-Reaching Effects of the "Declaration of Discharge"**

The Divine Commands had been designed to prevent any relapse into idolatry on the part of those newly-converted Muslims who were not yet confirmed in their faith. They struck at the very root of idolatry and the vicious immoralities attendant upon it. "This Declaration of Discharge" as it is styled by Muslim writers, "was", says Syed<sup>1</sup> Ameer Ali, a manifestation of far-sighted wisdom on the part of the Holy Prophet impossible for the state of society and morals which then existed to continue; the idolaters mixing year after year with the Muslim pilgrims, if allowed to perform the lascivious and degrading ceremonies of their cult,

1. Syed Ameer Ali —The Spirit of Islam. p. 108. Publishers Christophers. Ed. 1968.

would soon have undone what Muhammad had so laboriously accomplished. History had already seen another gifted, yet uncultured, branch of the same stock as the Arabs, settling amongst idolaters; their leaders had tried to preserve the worship of Jehovah by wholesale butcheries of the worshippers of Baal. They had failed miserably. The Israelites had not only succumbed to the evil influences which surrounded them, but had even surpassed those whom they at first despised in the practice of nameless abominations. Muhammad felt that any compromise with heathenism would nullify all his work. He accordingly adopted means seemingly harsh, but yet benignant in their ultimate tendency. The vast concourse which had listened to Ali returned to their homes, and before the following year was over the majority of them were Muslims.

### **The Shi'ite interpretation of Ali as the Executor of the Holy Prophet's injunctions**

The fact that Muhammad (may peace be upon him) appointed Ali to read the "Declaration of Discharge" as his representative at Mecca, is taken in the Shi'ite traditions as "a clear sign of the master to appoint him as his successor in things spiritual and secular. These traditions make out that Abu Bakr on his return to Medina, after the performance of the pilgrimage, asked the Holy Prophet the reason for his supersession by Ali, receiving as answer:—

"I was commanded by God that I should not depute any one for the proclamation of His Injunctions, save myself or one from me. Ali is from me and I am from Ali. He is my brother, the executor of my will, my collateral. He is my Caliph and performs all those functions and duties that devolve on me."

### **Expedition against the Banu Rumla**

One of the last Arab tribes to hold out against Islam

was the Banu Rumla. The members of this tribe lived in a very rugged country in the inaccessible defiles of the mountains surrounding Medina and were in the habit of attacking the inhabitants of the city, plundering and looting as they went. With the help of neighbouring tribes, they were now planning another such raid on Medina. When the news reached the Holy Prophet, he sent an expedition of a few hundred soldiers against them, led by Abu Bakr. The men of Banu Rumla had no standing army but were skilled in guerilla warfare. At the approach of the Muslim army, they concealed themselves in the mountains and, when the Muslim army was fast asleep, they made a surprise attack in the dead of night. Many Muslims were killed and Abu Bakr retired crest-fallen to Medina. A second expedition under Umar met with no better fate and a punitive expedition under Amr bin As was similarly defeated and forced to retreat to Medina.

The Holy Prophet then appointed Ali to wage war against the rebels. Ali quickly realised that the Muslims must change their tactics if they were to be successful. Up till now the Muslim commanders had all been surprised by the enemy before they had had a chance to give battle. The enemy well knew that they did not have the ghost of a chance of success if they permitted the Muslims to meet them in the open field and had therefore destroyed them while they were making camp. Ali decided to beat the Banu Rumla at their own game. Instead of leading his army by the recognised route he took them along mountainous tracks where they, too, could hide themselves. The enemy never dreamed that these warriors of the plains would follow such tracks. Ali also camped in the day-time and advanced his army only under cover of darkness. Consequently when he reached the mountain stronghold of the enemy he was able to take them completely by surprise. He attacked in the dead of night, putting many to the sword, while others took to flight.

When Ali returned to Medina after this decisive

victory the Holy Prophet received him with open arms, coming out of the capital to meet him. The Shi'ite traditions say the Holy Prophet was so filled with gratitude at Ali's success that he said:—

“O Ali! If I were not apprehensive that the Muslim community would exaggerate your deeds like the Christians, who extolled the achievements of Jesus Christ (by ascribing divinity to him), I would have narrated the superiority of your character today in such a way that wherever you went, the people would have worshipped the very dust of your feet.”

### **Operations against the Banu Zubuda**

Ali was next required to deal with a tribe which had accepted Islam and then reverted to polytheism. This was the Banu Zubuda, living to the west of Medina and headed by one Umar bin Madi Kurb. Umar had a feud with a warrior called Ushus Khusee, who had killed his father. Anxious to avenge his father's death, Umar took Ushus prisoner and led him to the Holy Prophet for arbitration. After hearing the case the Holy Prophet decided that after the acceptance of Islam, the question of seeking vengeance for the blood of relatives, which had prevailed in the 'Period of Ignorance', did not arise. This judgment hurt Umar so much that he abjured Islam and, on going back to his tribe, raised the standard of revolt. Umar then killed Harriith ibn Ka'b the chief of a tribe which had become feudatory to Islam. This killing of an ally of the Muslims could not be tolerated by the Holy Prophet, who immediately deputed Ali to lead a force against the Banu Zubuda. Before the general battle began Umar ibn Maudi Kurb came out and challenged Ali to single combat. At this Ali, “the Lion of Allah” came thundering out of the ranks and, chanting verses in which he glorified the valour of the Muslim heroes, struck such awe in the heart of his adversary that he fled from the battlefield. This left the people of the Banu Zubuda without a leader and

they promptly took to flight. Ali pursued them, took several of them prisoners and retired in triumph to Medina.

### **Ali as a Muslim Missionary in the Yemen**

In the last years of his life the Holy Prophet sought to bring even the most remote provinces of Arabia into the Islamic fold. Missionaries were sent to tribes living far from Mecca and Medina and one of these embassies, to the Yemen was led by that famous convert to Islam, Khalid bin Walid. For six months Khalid laboured in vain to bring the Yemenites to the Islamic way of thinking, but these proud people, who could boast of a highly developed civilization earlier even than that of the Egyptians, took the greatest pride in their traditions, culture and institutions. The Jewish and Christian colonies around Yemen were notable for their famous scholars who were well read in the Scriptures and were an authority in matters of religion. The Yemenites would not tolerate having any new creed thrust upon them and finding all his efforts of no avail Khalid's mission returned to Medina unsuccessful.

In 632 A.D. the Holy Prophet deputed Ali to undertake the uphill missionary task of propagating Islam in the Yemen. Before he left, the Holy Prophet personally inspected the three hundred Muhajirs and Ansar volunteers, who had gathered at Quba, near Medina, to accompany Ali, and presented "The lion of God" with a black standard. He then tied a turban on to Ali's head with his own hands, saying to him, "Now proceed to Yemen and preach amongst its inhabitants the divine laws of Islam. Do not try to excel the Yemenites in warfare. You have to enlighten the people in the commandments of God as revealed in the Holy Qur'an, to teach them the methods of prayers and extend to them the invitation to accept Islam. "Ali replied," O Lord! You are sending me amongst a race of people who are famed for wisdom, intelligence and experience.

I am an inexperienced young man, while their learned and aged people have an unchallenged reputation for sobriety and well balanced judgments. How on earth can I pass judgment in their suits that will come before me for trial?" Tradition says that the Holy Prophet laid his hands on Ali's heart and thus prayed to God, "O Almighty God! Loosen his tongue, sprinkle it with truthfulness, and enlighten his spirit and heart with the word of guidance." The unfaltering wisdom of Ali's judgments in Yemen are held to be proof of his having received the divine grace on this occasion.

As Ali made ready to leave, the Holy Prophet said further, "I swear by God that one conversion at your hands is far nobler and better for Islam than all the wonders of nature on which the Sun rises and sets."

Ali was to prove as good a preacher as he was a swordsman and his mission to the Yemen saw his emergence as a religious scholar of the first order. His personal example of stoical piety, coupled with his inspiring sermons, won over many of the Yemenites to Islam, and things which had looked hopeless to Khalid bin Walid now began to take a more favourable turn. The Christian priests and the Jewish Rabbis who had settled in Yemen held daily discourses with Ali on religious doctrines and dogmas, and Ali's illuminating sermons on the Unity of God, and the Islamic exposition of the values of life soon became the talk of the town. In one of these sermons the Christian priest Ka'b accepted Islam. Ka'b was a distinguished scholar and critic, renowned for his piety and learning. His example was soon followed by many Rabbis. So it was that the very people who had been so adamant in their refusal to accept Islam, and who had wanted to draw swords to keep their ancient polytheism, responded to Ali's invitation. By the end of a few weeks the famous Jewish tribe of the Hamdanids had accepted Islam. Other neighbouring tribes quickly followed suit. The Shi'ite traditions say that the exposition of Islam and the tongue of Ali were co-related like hand and glove, or

like soul in a body.

Meanwhile Ali's fellow missionaries were also busy in other parts of Yemen. The Yemenites did not live in any one particular town but were divided into branches, living in all parts of the province. To make sure that the doctrine of Islam reached every part of the Yemen, Ali divided his followers into four groups, giving to each of them a particular area of responsibility. The way in which Ali organised his fellow missionaries meant that the maximum number of conversions might be achieved.

### **The Farewell Pilgrimage of 632 A.D.**

In February 632 A.D. Muhammad (may peace be upon him) performed his last pilgrimage. An immense concourse of Muslims, some 140,000 strong had thronged to Mecca to perform the religious ceremony. His concept of a democratic divine government, his ethical ideals and his code of equality, fraternity and simplicity all materialised here before his eyes. As he heard the multitudes who had assembled shouting at the top of their voices, "Labbaik Allahumma, Laibbaik Allahuma" (Here am I, O Lord! Here am I, O Lord!) his heart filled with joy and he felt his mission to be complete.

Alone among all the Prophets, Muhammad (may peace be upon him) had lived to see his dreams become the reality. Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus Christ and all the ancient Jewish prophets had had to content themselves with leaving their unfulfilled work to their successors or disciples. It was only Muhammad who saw the successful fruition of his ideals and aspirations.

According to the Shi'ite chroniclers Ali, who was that bright fountain from which flowed the streams of eternal hope of deliverance, and who in his endeavours to arouse spiritual life in Yemen had successfully completed his mission by converting the erring inhabitants

into staunch believers in faith, was summoned by the Holy Prophet to join in the Farewell Pilgrimage, where, after the performance of religious rites, the Holy Prophet shared with him those animals which he sacrificed to God. The historic Khutba which the Holy Prophet delivered on this occasion was heard by hundreds of thousands of Muslims. Dressed in the seamless white robes of pilgrims, they flocked to Arafat, some ten miles from Mecca, the place where Adam and Eve are said to have met after their departure from the garden of Paradise.

From here the Holy Prophet took the road back to Medina, the concourse of his followers spreading for several miles. On arriving in the valley of Khum, near Tuhfa, the Holy Prophet received the following Revelation:—

“O Messenger of God! Make known that which hath been revealed unto thee from thy Lord, for if thou do it not, thou wilt not have conveyed His Message. Allah will protect thee from mankind. Lo! Allah guideth not the unbelieving folk.”

(Quran 5:67)

Calling a halt near a “Ghadir” or pond, the Holy Prophet ordered messengers to ride up and down, to bring to the front those who had lagged behind and to call back those who had gone ahead. It was mid-day and in the middle of the desert. The scorching sun beat down on the pilgrims who could not stand on the burning sand. Putting their linen sheets under their feet, they waited in breathless silence, anxious to know the cause of so sudden and urgent a summons.

### **The Khutba at Khum Ghadiar.**

When the last straggler had closed up and the assembly was complete, the Holy Prophet made his camel kneel, descended and then, using the saddle as a

pulpit began to address the multitude with<sup>1</sup> words to this effect:—

“Ye Men! I first thank God for those blessings which are latent in myself. I seek His help for those ordeals and sufferings which are to befall my grand-children and my family, and for the fatal privations of the world and the inevitable sorrows of the Day of Resurrection. Then I stand to witness that there is none worthy of worship except the one God Who has neither taken a wife or son to Himself nor a friend or a helper. I am also one of His creations. He has sent me to mankind for conveying His message that those who are doomed may be condemned after due warning and those who are to be saved may get salvation after due intimation. God has given me superiority over all those who inhabit the world, and they include all the past and future generations. He gave me the keys of His treasures and He asked me to confirm the solemn pledges which I have made with him. He confided his secret in me and gave me help so that I have been enlightened. Thus, I have made the beginning and thus shall I set the final seal. No one can derive power except from the Holy person of God.—O ye mankind! Fear God as he deserves to be feared. Do not wage war except in the path of Islam and remember God encompasses every thing. Verily nations will come after me that will wilfully accuse me and people will believe in those insinuations. But I seek the help of God that I should say nothing but what is absolutely true and right and should

1. The contents of this Khutba cannot be found at one place in any authentic work, but disjointed sentences concerning it abound in many books. The famous Shia writer Syed Aulad Hyder Foz Bigrimi in his book “Siraju’l Mubeen” published by Kazimi Book Depot Delhi, has collected this Khutba at one place. Although the Sunnis challenge its authenticity and give it no credence, the translation of this Shia writers words has been incorporated in this work to express Shia views on the subject. The views of Shias and sunnis on this matter are poles apart, the Shias vehemently insisting on its credulity, the sunnis dissenting from their interpretations.

not add or utter a word against His orders. I shall not convey any other orders to you except those that God has given me. I do not invite you to anything else but towards God. Those who are tyrants or the transgressors will soon know how they are taken to task."

The Holy Prophet had proceeded this far in his Oration when Abdah ibn Samat stood up and asked, "O Apostle of God. Tell us when this will happen and who are those people, so as to enable us to recognise them and avoid them." The Holy Prophet then continued, "There are some persons whose inimical attitude towards me from the very beginning has been an open secret. "Then pointing towards his throat he said, "When this breath (ghost) of mine will reach this point, these persons will show their appearance." Then Ibada asked, "When such a situation should arise, then tell us, to whom shall we turn?" The Holy Prophet then replied, "You should obey and follow those who are the members of my family. Undoubtedly they are fore-runners in receiving the light of my prophethood. They will check you from going astray and will lead you to the path of virtue. These members of my family are the followers of righteousness and the source of truth. They will preserve the Holy Book and keep alive my traditions, and will save you from apostacy and innovations that lead people astray. They will humiliate the evil doers with the force of truth and they will never lend ear to any ignorance. O ye people! God has created me and my family from the same clay and He did not create any one else from it. We are the first of creation and after God created us He dispelled the darkness with our light and revived everything with the fine qualities of our character." He then remarked, "Verily these people constitute the best of "Ummah" (community). They are the recipients of My knowledge, keepers of my secrets and leaders of the dwellers of this world. They invite others towards truth, and are

intimate with righteousness. Their minds are not invaded by doubts and scepticism. They never retrace a step from the path of God and never break their pledge with God. They are the "Pious Imams" or the leaders who have been enlightened. Those who come to me with their obedience and saintly qualities will be considered to have true light and those who come to me with enmity towards them are those who have lost the right path. Their love is Faith, their hostility verily a discord. These Imams who put men on the right path hold firm the strings of the order of God. All noble deeds receive completion through them, and God takes a pledge of their love from all the past and future generations. It is by these pious souls that God has sworn in the holy Qur'an. God orders me that those believers in faith, who ask questions about my blood relations, should be warned of God's wrath. Verily Allah is a true Guide. Then God, through this revelation has called upon you to love them. God has ordered me to inform you that He does not ask for any other returns excepting that ye people should love the members of my family. These are the people whom God has absolved from all evils and purified them; when they speak they utter nothing save truth, and when they are questioned about anything they display knowledge and wisdom, when anything is deposited with them in trust, they protect it. There are ten qualities of character in the members of my family which could not be found together in any one single person, namely tolerance, knowledge, prophethood, saintliness, generosity, bravery, truthfulness, purity, charity, and resignation to God's will. They are the utterances of virtue and the means of enlightenment, the height of rationality and means of salvation of mankind. These people are your leaders, according to the order of God and what I say is the order of God." Then the Apostle of God caught hold of Ali's arm and raising it up high, said, "*Ali is to me what Aaron was to Moses. Whoever takes me as his "Moula" (master) should also take Ali as his "Moula". O Almighty*

*God! be a friend to his friends and a foe to his foes; help those who help him, and frustrate the hopes of those who make little of him."*

According to the Shia chroniclers it was after this oration that the Holy Prophet received the following revelation:—

"This day are those who disbelieve in despair of (ever harming) your religion, so fear them not, fear me! This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed my favour unto you and have chosen for you al-Islam as a religion."

(Qur'an 5:3)

## **The Great Controversy**

Three months after his return to Medina the Holy Prophet died. Disputes over the succession arose immediately. The Shias consider the Khutba at Khum Ghadir to have been tantamount to a proclamation of Ali as his chosen successor, while the Sunnis insist that the appointment of Abu Bakr to officiate at the prayers on the very day of the Holy Prophet's death meant that it was he, not Ali, who represented the final choice. The arguments all hinge on the subsequent interpretations of the word "Moula" as used in the Khutba at Khum Ghadir. So important are these arguments to Muslims the world over and of such immense consequence in the history of Islam that they will be considered more fully in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

# THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

### **Differing Interpretations of the Word "Moula"**

For the past thirteen hundred and fifty years an endless controversy has been carried on over the meaning of the word "Moula" as used by the Holy Prophet at Khum Ghadir in 632 A.D. The "Sunnis" or traditionalists hold that "Moula" was meant to connote a "Friend" or "Guide", while the Shias maintain that it implies the meaning of "Lord" or "Master", or even "Sovereign". If interpreted according to the Shi'ite conception, then little doubt can remain that the Holy Prophet's declaration expressly designated Ali as his successor and that Ali should have become the first Caliph of Islam. The controversy is all the more acute because of the strong emotions which, over the centuries, it has engendered.

### **The Shi'ite Arguments**

The Shi'ites advance the following reasons for interpreting "Moula" as "lord" or "sovereign":—

(1) When the Holy Prophet invited his kinsmen to a banquet and asked that one of the assembly should come forward and become his Vizier in the cause of the propagation of Islam, none came forward except Ali, who was a lad under teens at that time. The Holy Prophet, at this juncture, took Ali's hand and said, "O Ali! You are my brother, Vizier, adviser and successor: The mob laughed at Ali whom they considered at that time

to be of no importance, but subsequent events were to prove that the Holy Prophet meant what he said on that occasion.

(2) When hard-pressed by the persecution of the Meccans it was Ali whom the Holy Prophet chose to lie on his bed so that he might make his escape safely to Medina. It was Ali who then risked his life to save the Apostle of God and Ali who was left behind as the representative of the Holy Prophet to perform the duty of returning to the Muslims still in Mecca whatever property they had deposited with Muhammad (may peace be upon him).

(3) After the "Hijrat" or "Emigration" to Medina, when the Holy Prophet organised a fraternity in which each Meccan refugee was joined with a local Medinite Ansar, the Apostle of God made Ali his co-sharer in this newly created brotherhood—an act symbolic of Ali's appointment as successor.

(4) The Holy Prophet's declaration at the time of the marriage of his daughter Fatima that, had there been no Ali he would have never wedded her to any one else, was an assertion symbolic of Ali's unqualified merit. Virtuous above all other men, only he could be considered as a successor to the Holy Prophet.

(5) When the Holy Prophet built the first Mosque at Medina, his companions were allowed to build their own residential quarters around it but it was only Ali who was allowed to open the door of his house towards the Mosque; the Holy Prophet declaring that all the others should close the doors which opened towards it. That Ali was singled out for this favour shows the piety and esteem in which the Holy Prophet held him. "Did this not show" says the Shi'ite tradition, "how worthy Ali was for succession to the Caliphate?"

(6) Ali's participation in all save one of the wars of the Holy Prophet, his heroic stand in duels, his love of Islam and his enthusiasm for its propagation clearly showed that no one else was as worthy to succeed the Holy Prophet.

(7) Ali's purge of the idols from the walls of the Kab'ah was significant in that the Holy Prophet made Ali his co-sharer in the divinely ordained task of the effacement of polytheism. The Holy Prophet's significant move in making Ali stand on his shoulders with the seal of prophethood under his feet, was intended to show to the world at large that he designated him as his successor in the very House of God.

(8) The Holy Prophet's injunction to Ali to go to Mecca at the time of pilgrimage and read out the contents of the "Declaration of Immunity" show that the Holy Prophet held him in greater esteem than he did Abu Bakr. Surah "al-Barat" was a divine command of God to Muhammad, who was expressly warned in it, either to go himself to the pilgrimage, or to depute a man who was his equal in rank to officiate in his place. This clearly showed that Ali was the only man chosen for the successorship of Muhammad.

(9) In the "Mubahila" with the Christian of Najran, the Holy Prophet's selection of Ali, his wife and two sons clearly proved that the Holy Prophet could not select a better man than Ali.

(10) Above all, the famous declaration at the valley of Khum now confirmed in plain words that which had, so far only been pointed out indirectly. The Shi'ite traditions dwell at length on this remarkably eloquent and enthusiastic address and assert that, after Muhammad had appointed Ali as the "Moula" of the "Ummah" (Lord of the community), the question of the appointment of Muhammad's successor by plebiscite of the people ought never to have arisen.

(11) The Shi'ite traditions further allege that to convene the assemblage of pilgrims in the burning heat of the midday sun, in the heart of a desert at Khum, merely to tell them that Ali was a friend of the Apostle of God, would have been an absurdity. The Holy Prophet's friendship and relationship with Ali was well known to all and sundry. Hence the Holy Prophet's words must have had a deeper meaning and the logical

deduction is that the word "Moula" meant a "ruler".

Ever since the Declaration of Khum Ghadir, the Shias all the world over have celebrated its annual anniversary with the "Feast of Ghadir", the most important of all the festivals of their creed. They commemorate the day by whitewashing their houses, illuminating them, holding banquets, and distributing alms to the poor, and sanctify it by holding "Majlis" in which their theologians deliver soul-stirring addresses. The extent of their religious enthusiasm and fervour may be deduced from the fact that for them the observance of the festival of "Khum Ghadir" is held to be superior to that of the Id-ul-Fitter, (the Id that falls after the month of Ramadan or Fasting).

### **The Sunnite Interpretation of "Khum Ghadir"**

The Sunni or Traditionalists of Islam do not attach much importance to the "Oration of Khum Ghadir". They hold that a major portion of this address is unauthentic, unreliable and a Fabrication of the Shi'ites. They even go so far as to say that it had its origins in a scandal associated with Ali's missionary period in Yemen and that the Holy Prophet was obliged to make these enthusiastic references to Ali in order to restore his much-damaged prestige. The Sunnis see the word "Moula" as no more than a re-assertion of Muhammad's friendship with Ali and maintain that the Holy Prophet never, at any time, indicated that the Caliphate should be confined to his line. On the contrary, they believe that the Holy Prophet left everything to the "Ummah" or community after his death, including the right of the community to determine the Caliphate by elective means.

### **Traditions Regarding the White Paper of 632 A.D.**

The Khutba of Khum Ghadir is not the only point of controversy between the Shias and the Sunnis. Their

traditions are also at variance concerning the White Paper of 632 A.D. The Shias maintain that, when the Holy Prophet knew his end to be near, he attempted to make a will but was prevented from doing so by certain schemers among the companions, notably Umar. Intrigues had already begun, according to the Shias, at the first signs of mortal sickness in the Holy Prophet.

It seems that in June 632 A.D. the Prophet went down with a violent fever, possibly typhoid or a malignant malaria. His condition rapidly worsened and at times he was delirious. During his period of consciousness he was greatly worried because preparations for a punitive expedition to the Roman frontier were not proceeding as rapidly as he had hoped. The expedition which was to avenge the death of Zaid, a Muslim general who had been murdered by the Romans was under the command of Zaid's son Usama, apparently an unpopular choice though the Shi'ite chroniclers have found a very different reason for the lack of volunteers for the army. During one of his periods of consciousness the Holy Prophet, on the arms of his uncle, Abbas and his son-in-law Ali, managed to get to the Mosque where he chided the people as follows:—

“Ye people! What is all this that I hear that some of you object to join the ranks? Perhaps you disapprove of Usama's appointment as commander of the Syrian expedition. If you have had the audacity to criticise Usama's appointment, you could have raised an objection to the appointment by me of his father, Zaid, as commander of the Muta expedition. I swear by the Almighty God that Usama is as fit to command an expedition as his father Zaid was. Truly I love Usama as much as I loved his father. Then why do you treat him ill? Verily he is the best among you.

According to the Shias the Holy Prophet was really reprimanding his companions for not joining the expeditionary force. Knowing that the Prophet's end was near, the companions were reluctant to leave Medina at such a critical time and fearful that, if they absented

themselves Ali might step uncontested into the Holy Prophet's shoes. They therefore continued to find excuses to postpone the expedition. The Sunnis place no credence on such elastic interpretation of the Prophet's oration.

The Shi'ite chroniclers further insist that the Holy Prophet had for some time entertained the fear that his other companions would try to usurp Ali's rights. It was for this reason that he wanted to make a will, getting so far as to call for paper, pen and ink. In this attempt he was frustrated by Umar, who told the audience gathered outside the house where Muhammad lay dying, that the Holy Prophet was delirious and his talk consisted of disjointed and meaningless sentences. This impeded the progress of will, the white paper remaining blank. Umar is said to have pronounced a will unnecessary, saying that the Book of God was legacy enough for the Believers. At this, the Shi'ite chroniclers say, the Holy Prophet lost his temper and, in great wrath, turned all his companions out of the room.

The Sunnite Traditions tell a different and contradictory story saying that none of the companions was present when the Holy Prophet lay dying, except his beloved wife Aisha, the daughter of Abu Bakr. When asked if Muhammad (may peace be upon him) had nominated Ali as his successor, she is said to have replied:—

"Who has fabricated such a story? The Holy Prophet in his last hours was resting his head on my bosom, asked for a bowl, bowed down and breathed his last. I hardly knew of the end. How could he make a will under the circumstances? On the contrary the Apostle stressed that his followers should act upon the Book of God<sup>1</sup>."

The Sunnis further cite in support of their view the authority of Abdullah bin Abbas, who related that Muhammad (may peace be upon him) neither left any will nor made any attempt to make one.

Bukhari—Kitabu'l Mughazi. CHAPEER ON ILLNESS OF THE Prophet.

**Abu Bakr leads the Prayers**

The Sunnite Traditions make much of the appointment of Abu Bakr to lead the prayers on the day Muhammad lay dying, considering this tantamount to an appointment as his successor. Col. Bodley<sup>1</sup> sums up the Sunni attitude as follows:—

“In the morning Muhammad did not feel able to lead the prayers. He accordingly gave Abu Bakr orders that he should lead them in his place. This was the nearest he ever came to appointing a successor. It is, nevertheless, clear that this is what he intended. When he had been available, no one but himself had led the prayers. When he had not been available, any of the original converts who happened to be there had done so. Today he could have ordered Umar or Uthman or Ali to deputize. By singling out the trusty colleague, by choosing Aisha as his nurse and her quarters as his sick room, Muhammad manifestly indicated that he meant the caliphate to pass to the man who had shared the good with the bad since the start of Islam.”

The Shias maintain that Ali was not available to lead the prayers because he and Fatima did not want to leave the Prophet as he lay dying. To the weeping Fatima the Prophet is supposed to have said, “Why weep my darling be of good cheer for you will be the first of my people who will join me in paradise”. A prophecy which came true when Fatima died only six months after her beloved father, but which did not include any reference to Ali as Caliph.

**The Holy Prophet's Silence to Nominate a Successor**

Indeed the Holy Prophet scrupulously avoided making any mention of a successor at any time. Not a word did he ever utter which could be construed as

3, Col. R.C. Rodley—*The Messenger*, p. 286-87. Publishers Orientalis, Lahore.

revealing his inner feelings on the subject of the succession. On the contrary he never, by word or deed, gave the least hint of his wishes. It is indeed sad that the strife which the Holy Prophet sought so assiduously to avoid became so bitter and that it has endured so long.

### **Claimants to the Caliphate**

The dispute for the succession began immediately the Holy Prophet died. The Medinites laid claims of their own, while the Meccans contested their rights. Abu Bakr and Umar tried to come to terms with the Ansars of Medina. Only Ali held himself aloof "Ali" say the Shi'ite chroniclers, "struck with grief, was busy washing and perfuming the dead body of Muhammad. After preparing the corpse for burial, Ali repaired to the graveyard and entered the grave which had been dug for the burial of his master. He cleaned its dust with his own hands, and then lowered the shrouded corpse with his own hands."

### **The Death of Fatima**

The Holy Prophet had left no sons and only one daughter, Fatima, who died of a broken heart six months after the death of her father. Grief had consumed her mind and broken her body and her last months on this earth must have caused the greatest distress to Ali. On her death, early in 633 A.D., his sorrow knew no bounds and he wrote the following very touching verse which shows how utterly bereft of friends he now felt.

Afflicted as I feel;  
With many a worldly disease;  
And the men of this world;  
Will suffer so long as they live;  
In this vale of tear and sorrow;  
Verily after the demise of the Apostle;

Fatima's loss has shown;  
That friends do not last for ever;

Ali used to visit Fatima's grave very often and used to give vent to his sorrow by composing verses. At one time he wrote:

O thou grave! To thee I resort;  
For paying homage unto thee.  
O thou! the repository of my beloved;  
Ye answer me not.  
O thou beloved tomb! What ails you;  
Ye respond not to the supplications?  
Art thou out of humour? Because of the  
Love that I bore ye.

### **Ali's Position during the Holy Prophet's lifetime**

The death of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) left Ali with a sense of the deepest personal loss. That the two men had been bosom companions cannot be doubted by any one, though it is left to the Shia annalists to extol Ali's virtues.

Briefly the Shia chronicles may be summed up as follows:—

Ali, the alter ego of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) was born in the Kab'ah, won over to Islam by the prayers of the Holy Prophet, bred and brought up in his house, petted and fondled by him, carried on his shoulders as a child (where the seal of prophethood touched his feet) was loved by the Holy Prophet in his infancy.

Ali, the youngman, was constantly eulogised by the Holy Prophet, who praised his virtue, wisdom, scholarship, talent, bravery, piety and integrity in many recorded speeches and on many and varied occasions. By giving his daughter in marriage to Ali, the Holy Prophet made clear the love and esteem which he felt for Ali.

Ali, the warrior, gave himself whole-heartedly to the

cause of his master and friend, fighting the most dangerous duels against the bravest adversaries to bring honour to the Apostle and to Islam. In return the Holy Prophet constantly prayed to God to protect Ali in these combats, declaring that whosoever loved Ali loved him and whosoever hated Ali would incur the wrath of God and His Prophet. On all matters of military strategy and tactics the Holy Prophet consulted Ali, never fighting a battle without his advice. Whenever the toughest enemies were to be encountered it was always to Ali that the holy Prophet presented the banner of command.

In spiritual and secular matters the Holy Prophet always upheld Ali's judgments and declared that all true Muslims must believe in Ali. Ali was a living example of all the Islamic virtues and the Muslim who adored Ali was a true believer, one who showed hostility towards Ali was thereby condemned.

In short the personality of Ali may be said to have mattered much in the Holy Prophet's life.

### **Ali's Role in the Caliphate of Abu Bakr**

Shia traditions dwell at length on the afflictions of Ali after the Holy Prophet's death. According to them, Ali felt himself greatly wronged by the illegal accession of Abu Bakr. They point out how heroically Ali refused to be coerced in paying homage to him how Umar threatened Ali with death if he were to hesitate when swearing the oath of fealty to Abu Bakr; how the law suit brought by Fatima, who claimed a share in the crown lands of Fidak, was dismissed by Abu Bakr simply to put pressure on Ali by depriving him of his legal patrimony. Ali, at this juncture, is said to have retired voluntarily from the political arena in order to avoid warfare, turning a deaf ear to the overtures of the Quraish chiefs like Abu Sufyan who wished him to contest the caliphate with his sword. Showing the same selfless devotion to the Islamic deals as he had shown during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, Ali withdrew

from all intrigues and spent his days in studying and teaching the Qur'an. His acceptance of the appointment of Chief Justice under Abu Bakr is a further proof, according to the Shi'ite chroniclers, of the superhuman character of Ali, who might well have withheld his services from the man who had usurped his title.

The Shi'ites go on to say that it was only with the greatest reluctance that Abu Bakr had offered Ali this post, that he was compelled to do so for want of any other man of equal merit. For the same reason Abu Bakr was obliged to consult Ali and to seek his advice before taking decision on any matters of importance. Whenever a deputation of foreign powers waited on Abu Bakr at Medina, the Caliph used to send for Ali, who disposed of their business. Ali was also the Chief Secretary of Abu Bakr's Government, and conducted the correspondence of the Islamic Commonwealth, drafted the treaties, and signed them on behalf of the government. Judicial cases in which Ali had pronounced his wise judgments still serve as precedents for Muslim jurists.

In short, say the Shi'ite chroniclers Ali laboured night and day, throughout the reign of Abu Bakr, for the welfare and betterment of the State.

These Shi'ite contentions are repudiated by the Sunnis, who maintain that they are based on partisan sentimentalism, not on any factual data of history. The mere fact that Ali accepted the job of Chief Justice under Abu Bakr and worked on it for nearly two and a half years until the death of Abu Bakr conclusively proves the cordiality of the relationship that existed between both of them.

### **Ali's Role under Umar the Great**

After the death of Abu Bakr, Umar the Great became the Caliph. The Shi'ite traditions, in the most emphatic terms, denounce Umar as the greatest enemy of Ali and his family. They make out that Abu Bakr and Umar had conspired against Ali from the beginning

and that they had been in league together to oust him from the Caliphate. They claim that Abu Bakr's nomination of Umar as his successor was a pre-meditated and well-deliberated plan to usurp Ali's rights and that Umar's dying behest that his successor should be nominated by a council of Six was similarly designed to thwart Ali's legitimate claims. The fact that Ali continued to hold the office of Chief Justice under Umar and that he also acted as Secretary of State only goes to prove how selfless Ali was. Only a superman, the Shi'ite chronicles claim, would be capable of leaving aside all personal consideration. "Such a super-human character, to befriend the bitterest foe could only be found in a superman like Ali." Zealously and selflessly, Ali steered the ship of state safely through the storms that threatened to engulf it. The fact that Ali persuaded Umar to adopt the year of the "Hijrah" as the starting point of the Muslim year, one of the outstanding achievements, of Ali serves further to indicate how Ali kept ever alive his personal devotion to the Holy Prophet and to the Islamic ideals that he had learned from his master and friend.

The Sunnis draw quite different conclusions from Ali's acceptance of the appointment as Chief Justice in the reign of Umar, insisting that relations between the two men were cordial.

### **Summary of the Shi'ite views on Ali's relations with Abu Bakr and Umar**

The great Shia writer, <sup>1</sup>Syed Ameer Ali while discussing Ali's services to both Abu Bakr and Umar, writes as follows:—

"With his usual magnanimity and devotion to the Faith, scrupulously anxious to avoid the least discord among the disciples of the Master, Ali at once gave his support to Abu Bakr. Three times was he set aside,

1. Syed Ameer Ali—*The Spirit of Islam*, p. 293. Publishers Christophers, London, Ed. 1955.

and on every occasion he accepted the choice of the electors without demur. He himself had never stood forth as a candidate for the suffrages of the electors and whatever might have been the feeling of his partisans, he had never refrained from giving to the first two Caliphs his help and advice in the governance of the Commonwealth: and they on their side had always deferred to his counsel and his exposition of the Master's teachings."

### **The Sunnis' Repudiation of the Shi'ite charges**

The Sunnis repudiate all the charges brought against Abu Bakr and Umar of usurping the rights of Ali. They allege that, when closely examined, they prove to be mere insinuations which have been magnified and coloured by the fervour of Ali's partisans. In support of the Sunni position they bring forward the following arguments:—

(1) Abu Bakr and Umar are known to have led selfless lives; their piety and their exemplary position in Islam afforded no motive for harbouring any grudge or ill-will against Ali or his Hashimite kinsmen. On the contrary, the bestowal on him of the appointments of Chief Justice and Secretary of State under them, the two unique honours that they could offer to any one, reveal the affection in which they held him. Umar's saying "Aqduna Ali" (Ali is the greatest judge from amongst us all) shows the respect and esteem in which Umar held him.

(2) At no time did Ali contest the Caliphate. He took the oath of allegiance, and willingly accepted the sovereignty of Abu Bakr and Umar.

(3) Ali's cordial relations with Umar can be judged from the fact that Ali gave his daughter, Umm Kulthum, in marriage to Umar.

(4) Ali named his three sons Abu Bakr, Uthman and Umar. A fact that shows the great love that he bore towards these companions of the Holy Prophet.

(5) That Ali held Umar in a like esteem is shown

by the oration delivered by Ali at Umar's funeral. Speaking of the corpse that lay before him, Ali said, "I see no one in this world whose deeds I should like better to imitate when going to the presence of God."

### **Ali's role in the History of Islam**

In the controversy between the Shi'ites and the Sunnis, the wishes of Ali himself are all too easily forgotten. Ali desired at all costs to avoid civil war; he did not seek the aid of the partisans who insisted on championing his cause, nor did he aspire to the Caliphate to which he was ultimately elected. This most learned, pious and devoutest of Muslims wanted only to serve Islam and he would have been appalled to know that, in the words of the famous Muslim historian Shahrastani, "Never was there an Islamic issue that brought about more bloodshed than the Caliphate".

"The Caliphate" says Professor Hitti, "was the first problem Islam had to face. It is still a living issue."

## CHAPTER VII

# SUMMARY OF UTHMAN'S REIGN: (644-56 A.D.)

### **Uthman, the Third Caliph of Islam**

One more Caliph was to rule before Ali. This was Uthman, the third of the Orthodox Caliphs, in whose reign the civil wars began. Sedition, sporadic risings and finally open rebellion culminated in the assassination of Uthman in 656 A.D. Ali has been accused of complicity in the murder and, in order that the reader may understand how such charges could have arisen, it is necessary to give here the background of events that led up to the assassination of Uthman.

### **Uthman's Accession and Character**

The election of Uthman as the third Caliph resulted in restoring the prestige of the Meccan, Quraish. Uthman, was a member of the Umayyad clan a party which had been holding power in Mecca before it was captured by the Holy Prophet.

Uthman<sup>1</sup> was, like Ali, a son-in-law of the Holy Prophet and was called "Dhun Nurain" (the possessor of two Lights) because he had married two of the daughters of Muhammad (may peace be upon him). He married Ruqaya first and then, after her death, Umm Kulthum. In point of fact the succession was not

1. The Shia writers refuse to recognise the validity of these marriages. They hold that Ruqaya and Umm Kulthum were the daughters of Khadija from her earlier husband and not from the Holy Prophet. But such a contradiction is not warranted by facts.

decided on dynastic grounds but, following the ancient Arab custom most probably on seniority. Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman were all senior to Ali. Uthman, indeed, was seventy years old at the time of his accession. "The choice (Of Caliphate)" according to Dozy<sup>1</sup> was scarcely justified by Uthman's personality. He was it is true, both wealthy and liberal, and had made pecuniary sacrifices on behalf of Muhammad and his followers; but when it is added that he was the personification of good nature and diffidence, almost all his merits have been enumerated. His intellect, never very powerful, had been enfeebled by the approach of old age—he had reached three score years and ten—and so great was his timidity, that when he mounted the Minbar (pulpit) for the first time, courage and words alike failed him. "A first attempt is a very difficult thing" he muttered with a sigh, as he descended from the pulpit. Unfortunately for himself, this kindly old man had an excessive partiality for his family—and his family belonged to that Meccan aristocracy who for twenty years had insulted, persecuted and opposed Muhammad. The Caliph was in complete subjection to them."

### **Uthman's Favouritism Alarms the Bedouine**

It was doubly unfortunate that the relations to whom Uthman gave key appointments<sup>2</sup> had been so inimical

1. Dozy — *Spanish Islam*, p. 27. Publishers Chatto and Windus. Ed. 1913.

2. Efforts have been made by very many Sunni writers to whitewash the scandal of Uthman's favouritism. They allege that Uthman had been misjudged, that he was averse to shedding any Muslim blood and that for the solidarity of Islam he gave his own life. They say that the integrity of Uthman could be proved from the fact that the sons of Ali, Talha and Zubair performed the duty of armed guards at Uthman's residence. Had Uthman been a tyrant these persons would have deserted him.

With regard to the charge of favouritism, they assert that Uthman never gave any riches to his kinsmen from the Royal Exchequer but from his personal private purse. Thus he never usurped the rights of others. In regard to the appointment of his kinsmen to lucrative posts, the traditionalists hold that Uthman was justified in doing so, as he could repose trust in them. Did not Ali fill all the important posts of state with his own kinsmen when he became the Caliph? If Uthman was over-generous to his kinsmen, was he not fulfilling an obligation required of him by Islam? Further, they go on to say that Islam reached its zenith during Uthman's regime, as can be proved from the fact that no foreign power dared to invade

to the Holy Prophet. The Arabs in general, and the Bedouine population of Kufa and Basra in particular, had cause to be jealous of the growing supremacy of the Quriash. Even amongst the Quraish themselves, there was a split: the Hashimites were embittered against the Umayyads, who had resisted them with all their might until Islam had become too strong a force for them to defy. Their conversion even then had always been looked upon as a matter of convenience rather than of conviction.

Hakam—an opportunist who had accepted Islam on the day of the capture of Mecca and who, having betrayed state secrets, was cursed and banished from Medina by the Holy Prophet was not only recalled by Uthman but also given one hundred thousand pieces of silver coins together with a fief from the crown lands. Further Uthman gave his daughter in marriage to Hakam's son, Merwan, whom the Caliph then appointed his secretary.

The governorship of Egypt also went to a "renegade" who had been proscribed by the Holy Prophet. Uthman appointed his foster brother, Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarah, in place of the wily 'Amr ibn As, who had

Medina in spite of the internal disorder that prevailed. Does it not conclusively prove the prestige of Muslim arms? The Sunni writers further support their arguments with the saying of the Holy Prophet who is said to have prophesied "On the day when Uthman will attain martyrdom, the angel of heaven will descend on this earth to offer funeral prayers." On the day of the battle of the Camel, Ali is said to have remarked, "O Almighty Lord, curse the murderers of Uthman."

Ali, during his caliphate, is said to have delivered a Khutba, at the central mosque in Kufa, in which he said, "The position of Uthman and myself is like that of three oxen—one white, one red, and one black, who lived in a jungle. There was a lion who lived nearby. He could not get access to any of those oxen because of their unity. One day the lion said to two of the oxen, if there were no white ox no one can overpower us. The colour of this ox endangers our position. Should you allow me to eat it up, we may get rid of this fear." Both the oxen agreed to it, and the lion devoured the white ox. After a few days the lion addressed the red ox and said, "you have a colour like that of mine and every one can easily take you as my kith and kin. If you continue to live with the black ox people will think that you belong to his category. You will always run the fear of being caught by the hunters. Should you allow me, I will eat up the black ox." The red ox agreed to it and the lion killed the black ox. After some days the lion again came to the red ox and said, "Now it is your turn. I am going to eat you up." The Ox said, "Let me cry out thrice before you eat me." The lion agreed to it. The ox then loudly cried out three times, "I was devoured on that very day when you ate the white ox." Ali then addressing the congregation emphatically said, "I was weakened on the very day when Uthman was murdered." "Could Ali" say the Sunni writers "ever deliver such a Khutba, if he thought evil of Uthman?"

governed Egypt for Umar the Great. Abdullah, while acting as the Holy Prophet's amanuensis, had tampered with the words of revelation and perverted their meanings. On being detected he had fled for his life from Medina, becoming an apostate and relapsing into idolatry. On the day of the occupation of Mecca, he was brought before the Holy Prophet, who would have put him to death but for Uthman's intercession. It is generally presumed that Sura VI verse 94 of the Holy Qur'an was expressly aimed at this Abdullah, when God said,

"And who is more unjust than he who forges a lie against God, or says: It has been revealed to me, while nothing has been revealed to him: and he who says: I can reveal the like of what God has revealed? And if thou hadst seen when the unjust shall be in the agonies of death and the angels shall spread forth their hands: Give up your souls. This day you are awarded doom of degradation for that you spoke concerning Allah other than the truth, and scorned His Communications." (Qur'an 6:94)

Other notorious magnates of the Umayyad house, renowned for their laxity in religion, were raised to the highest posts of state. One of the most unpopular of these appointments was that of the Caliph's half-brother, Walid ibn Aqaba to the provincial governorship of Kufa, in place of Sa'd, the conqueror of Persia. The people still remembered that it was Walid's father Aqaba, who had spat into the Holy Prophet's face and had once even made an abortive attempt to strangle him. After the Battle of Badr, Aqaba had been brought before the Holy Prophet, and condemned to death. When despairing, Aqaba had asked the Holy Prophet, "Should I die, who will take care of my children?" the Holy Prophet had replied, "the fire of hell". After the execution of Aqaba, people began to call Walid the 'Child of Hell', a nick-name which stuck to him throughout his life.

On taking charge of the government of Kufa, Walid

did not adopt an orderly life as ordained by Islam. We are told how on one occasion, when he was participating in a banquet which was enlivened by wine and singing he stayed on until dawn. Hearing the "Muezzin's" call to prayers he staggered to the Mosque, where, fuddled with wine and not knowing what he was doing, he recited the wrong prayers. After they were over, in an attempt to prove that he was sober, he asked the congregation whether the prayers offered were quite sufficient or whether they wanted any more. "By Allah" said a voice from the assemblage, "I will tarry for no other prayers from such a man as thou. I could not have believed that a governor like you could be sent to us from Medina." This outspoken critic then started tearing up the pavement of the Mosque. Afraid of an assault from the mob, Walid fled from the Mosque. On arriving at his palace he began defiantly to sing the verses of a pagan poet,

"Where wine and song abound;  
There will you find me;  
Mine is no heart of flint;  
Immune to good cheer."

Small wonder, therefore, that Kufa was to become one of the hot-beds of rebellions.

In Busra, Uthman's cousin, Abdullah bin Amr supplanted Abu Musa Ash'ari, who remarked "Now you will have tax collectors to your heart's content, rich in cousins, aunts, uncles, who will flood you with harpies."

Only in Syria did Uthman retain the man that his predecessor had appointed—because the governor, Mu'awiyah happened to be a cousin of his. Mu'awiyah, who was later to become Ali's greatest rival, had already earned notoriety as a weather cock—an opportunist who for his own self-aggrandisement would use each and every one as a pawn in the game of power politics.

Thus from the moment of his accession, Uthman, appointed a host of his kinsmen to all key posts of the state—some of whom had been the deadliest enemies

of the Holy Prophet at the outset of his career. In the words of a Shia chronicler he made these appointments, "to the great delight of the vulgar who were only too glad to exchange elderly devotees, harsh and austere, for jovial and witty nobles, but much to the chagrin of orthodox Muslims, who conceived a profound aversion to Uthman's government and that of his provincial governors." This much hated favouritism alienated the sympathies of the devout, retarded the progress of Islam and created a schism in Islam which has been well portrayed by Will Durrant<sup>1</sup> in these words:—

"Islam, relaxing in victory, was divided into ferocious factions: Refugees from Mecca versus "Helpers" from Medina, ruling cities of Mecca and Medina versus the fast-growing Muslim cities of Damascus, Kufa and Basra; the Quraish aristocracy versus the Bedouine democracy; the Holy Prophet's Hashimite clan led by Ali versus the Umayyad clan led by Mu'awiyah—son of Muhammad's chief enemy Abu Sufyan, but now governor of Syria."

### **Von Kremer's comment on it**

Von<sup>2</sup> Kremer, while discussing the reign of Uthman, comments as follows:—

"Thus the Ansar (helpers of Medina), the old companions of Muhammad, who in the life time of the Prophet, and still more so under Abu Bakr and Umar, had formed, so to speak, a hierarchical aristocracy, found themselves suddenly supplanted by the Meccan party who had joined Islam as a last resort, and then only outwardly. Personal interest and religious zeal enkindled and fanned their wrath and bitterness more and more. The democratic—communistic principles which Umar had fashioned and championed were still full of life and force, and the people therefore were not

1. Will Durrant—*The Age of Faith* p. 191.

2. Von Kremer's *Staatsidee des Islam* English translation published under the name "Politics in Islam" by Professor Khuda Bakhsh. Publishers, Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore p. 36-37. Edition 1954.

inclined to accept or submit to the autocratic assertion of power with which Uthman dealt with what was regarded as public property. The gift to his cousin and to others set the people aflame.

Abu Dharr Ghaffari, one of the most pious Muslims of his time, urged upon the governor of Syria the view that the rich should be compelled to give a fraction of their wealth for the benefit of the poor. On this question a violent dispute arose between him and Mu'awiyah, with the result that Mu'awiyah sent him to the Caliph as a fomentor of discord and strife, and the Caliph banished him to the little village of Rabadah.

Enthusiasts like Abu Dharr were many in the days of early Islam. Thus the party of the distinguished grew more and more. Ali, the most distinguished living member of the family, joined them and with him went many of the Prophet's companions such as Talha, Zubair, 'Ammar ibn Yasir and Abu Musa Ash'ari."

### **Ali's Role in the Caliphate of Uthman**

Ali with the same selfless devotion which had characterised him to render valuable service to the cause of Islam under Abu Bakr and Umar, gave in his adhesion to Uthman, when he was elected Caliph. Ali had held the dual charge of Chief Justice and the Secretary General of the State under Abu Bakr and Umar but Uthman conferred upon Ali the appointment of Chief Justice and bestowed the office of the Secretary General on his cousin Merwan. As a Chief Judge Ali worked zealously day and night for Uthman's government and the fame of his judgments spread far and wide. With the growing discontent that began to prevail in the later part of Uthman's reign, Ali began to retire from the political arena and concentrate on the preaching of the Qur'an. At no time would he associate himself with the rebels and is said to have preserved the same impartial devotion that he had previously shown to the predecessors of Uthman. It is true that he looked as-

kance at Uthman's favouritism, but never would he lend an ear to the rebels. To Ali the person of the Caliph was sacred because he was God's Pontiff on earth. When the rebels besieged Uthman's house, Ali sent his sons to guard the Caliph's person and property. Being the most influential man in Medina, Ali tried, though in vain, to intervene and advise the rebels to leave the Caliph alone and to return to their homes.

Von Kremer's remark that Ali had associated himself with the rebels is not warranted by facts. To an over-conscientious man like Ali, it was nothing short of sacrilege and profanity to see eye to eye with the rebels or with their cause. It is probable the rebels in order to champion their cause as a means of gaining their own ends might have used Ali's name but it is certain that neither did he identify with them nor with their activities.

### **Summary of the Outstanding Events of the Reign of Uthman**

Our chroniclers artificially divide the reign of Uthman into two distinct parts—the first half, from 644-50 A.D. being a time of good government, and the second half from 650-56 A.D. being a period of confusion and anarchy. In the first half of his reign, Uthman fortified his frontiers and followed the ambitious designs of expansion. He restored peace on the north eastern frontier, added Khurasan, Nishapur, Merv, Tus and Tabristan, and won the homage of the chiefs of Turkistan, Afghanistan, Herat, Kabul and Ghizni. On the Syrian front he inflicted a crushing defeat on the Romans and added Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Asia Minor to the Caliphate. He is said to have pushed the Islamic forces as far as Tiflis and the Black Sea. As a father of the Muslim navy, Uthman built ships and captured the Island of Cyprus. The Romans who had invaded and conquered Alexandria were driven back with heavy losses and the Caliph's army re-entered Alexandria and Egypt. The Muslim forces then penetrated into Tripoli and Barqa.

By inflicting a crushing defeat on the Roman commander, Gregory, in Africa, the Caliph's forces consolidated his African possessions.

By the second half of Uthman's reign, the Caliph had attained the advanced age of eighty. Meek, conciliatory and mild by nature, the Caliph was by this time spending most of his days in the performance of religious duties, in reading the Qur'an, in solitary meditation, fasting and prayers. By favouring his kinsfolk, who were notoriously irreligious he had, however, alienated the sympathies of the masses. While the new, standardised version of the Holy Qur'an that he had authorised led to schisms in the clerical parties sporadic risings began to take place in various parts of the country and a class of conspirators arose who, posing as the avengers of an outraged religion organised large-scale rebellions in Iraq, Kufa, Basra, and Egypt. By the year 656 Muslims all over the Islamic Commonwealth—in Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Persia and Egypt—were seething with unrest. The struggle for the change of Caliphate had begun.

### **Propaganda in the Provinces**

With the expansion of Islam, new colonies had grown up in the distant lands of Syria, Persia, Egypt and Central Asia. New cities like Basra, Kufa and Fustat had also swelled the ranks of Islam with a flood of converts, many of whom had accepted Islam from purely secular motives. These cities now became centres of sedition, breeding the germs of rebellion, mischief and disloyalty. The ideas of equality and the fraternal brotherhood of all Muslims, so much developed and nurtured by Umar, contrasted ill with Uthman's actions, and it was not difficult to magnify these irregularities and to concoct charges which were calculated to stir up the resentment of the local inhabitants. The Bedouine of the desert who had shared the joys and sorrows of all the battles of the Holy Prophet also had cause for grievance for they now had to fall into the

background and to suffer the advancement of those who had always opposed the Holy Prophet. They were predisposed to listen to propaganda against Uthman and thus the way was paved for a civil war.

### **Revolutionary Preachings of Ibn Sud**

One of the most famous revolutionaries to advance the cause of Ali was Ibn Saba, later styled Ibn Sud, (or son of a negro) because he had been born of a negro mother. Ibn Sud, a Jew of Yemen, accepted Islam in 654 A.D. and, with all the fanaticism of a recent convert, went as a missionary to Basra. Here he first preached the heretical doctrine that Ali was the only legitimate successor of the Holy Prophet, that the Umayyads were a race of godless traitors and that Uthman was an usurper.

Tireless in his efforts to fan the smouldering fires of disaffection Ibn Sud next went to Kufa and from there to Syria. One of the ways in which he stirred up anger against the governor of Syria was by referring repeatedly to the case of Abu Dharr, whom he depicted as one of the true Islamic enthusiasts. Ibn Sud then reminded the people assembled to hear him that, because he had expounded the Islamic verse:

“Those who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in Allah’s way, announce to them a painful chastisement”,  
(Qur’an 9:34)

Abu Dharr had incurred the displeasure of the niggardly Mu’awiya and had been banished from the capital in consequence.

From Syria Ibn Sud went to Egypt, where he gained a considerable personal following of about five hundred Egyptians. Egypt was particularly fertile ground for the seeds of sedition. Two distinguished revolutionaries—Muhammad the son of the late Abu Bakr and Muhammad bin Abu Hudaifah the adopted son of the Caliph Uthman—had already begun to stir up trouble.

Abu Bakr's son had hoped for the governorship of Egypt for himself, while the latter youngman bore a grudge against his foster father for personal reasons. The agitators also found an influential patron in the person of 'Amr bin As who had secretly encouraged the rebels from the day that he had been supplanted as governor of Egypt by Uthman's foster-brother Abi Sarah.

### **The Gathering of the Storm**

Every province of the Islamic Commonwealth now nursed some grievance or other against the Caliph. Everywhere the people were seething with unrest because of his nepotism and favouritism; because of the lavish way in which he wasted the public treasury on his favourites; because he was "unscrupulous in his disregard of the Islamic laws or because they had taken offence at the standardisation of the Holy Qur'an. From Basra, Kufa and Egypt they came, delegation after delegation, to lodge their complaints with the Caliph until, finally, their patience was near its end. In their zeal to overthrow the faulty administrative machinery they sent messengers to enlist the support of the widows of the Holy Prophet, solicited leave to visit the tomb of the Apostle of God so as to gain access to the city and constantly sought permission to present petitions to the Caliph.

The effect of this influx of malcontents on the ordinary people of Medina was disrupting in the extreme and a situation developed which looked very much like a wide-spread and well-organised conspiracy against the Caliph and the State. The mob now sought to bring pressure to bear on the Caliph either to redress their grievances or to abdicate.

### **Uthman Warns the Medinites**

When Uthman was told of these treacherous activities in the very heart of his capital he ascended the

pulpit and gave the following warning:—

“They (the seditionists) have now gathered a round to put an end to my life but they must now know that if ever they dare to raise hands against me, it would lead to such a conflagration amongst the Believers that none of them will save himself, and they will repent ever afterwards.”

The immediate effect of this warning was that those Medinites who were loyal to Uthman decided to close their ranks against the agitators who had infiltrated into their city. Civil war seemed imminent and at this juncture the conspirators decided to turn to Ali in the hope that he would assume their leadership. They soon realised their mistake. Ali was far too noble a character to lend himself to any such treacherous<sup>1</sup> schemes. Instead, he told them that, should war arise, he would be the first to defend Uthman with his sword and, if necessary, would lay down his life for his sake. Ali told the rebels, further, that they were the accursed of God and of the Apostle. He did, however, promise to intercede on their behalf with the Caliph and said that he did not doubt but that their grievances would be quickly redressed.

Apparently satisfied by the conciliatory attitude of Ali and by the extraction of a promise from him that the provincial governors would be changed, the rebels now returned to their respective camps and made preparations to return to their provinces from which they had come. Some historians maintain that this move by the rebels was only a ruse to put the Medinites off their guard and that they had planned, all along, to return to Medina when the city was unalerted and unprotected.

The withdrawal of the rebels certainly had the desired effect. Feeling themselves to be once more safely in the saddle, the Medinites returned to their normal way of life and for the time being the threat of civil war appeared

1. Attempts by the rebels to win over Talha and Zubair were equally abortive.

to have subsided. This might well have been the case, had it not been for a most unfortunate incident. While on their way home, the Egyptians met one of the Caliph's messengers at the halting place of 'Arish, a few miles from Medina. He was carrying a letter from the Caliph to the governor of Egypt. The rebels detained the messenger, intercepted the letter and opened it. It contained an order from the Caliph to the Egyptian governor to the effect that as soon as the ring-leaders of the rebels reached Egypt, their hands and feet were to be cut off and they were to be impaled along with the other culprits. The letter bore the seal and superscriptions of Uthman.

### **The Mystery of the Letter**

The authorship of this letter has remained a mystery. Either it was forged by the seditionists themselves, to give them an excuse for re-entering Medina, or was the outcome of the villainy of the Caliph's Secretary, Merwan, who wrote it and put the Caliph's seal on it. Certainly the Messenger had been sent without the Caliph's knowledge and sent, moreover, by a route where he was most likely to fall into the hands of the Egyptian rebels.

The Shi'ite chroniclers assert, most emphatically, that the letter was the work of Merwan, who hated Ali and who had recourse to this trickery in order to re-inflame the differences that Ali had so admirably and tactfully composed. The Sunnis, on the other hand, point out how easy it would have been for the rebels to make a counterfeit of the Caliph's seal and that they had carefully planned the whole affair as part of a stratagem to get back into Medina. It seems that Ali himself, unlike his partisans, also suspected the rebels of a pre-meditated and concerted plan of action.

Whatever the origin of the letter may have been, not only the Egyptians, but three bands of rebels turned back towards Medina, pitching their tents before the city.

**The Caliph Answers the Allegations**

Ali interviewed the rebels and asked them how it was that they had all returned simultaneously, especially as their destinations had lain in three different directions and could only have been reached by three different roads. Dissatisfied with their story, he then took them to the venerable old Caliph who solemnly declared, on oath, that he had no personal knowledge of the letter and that it must have been forged by his enemies. Angry altercations followed and the behaviour of the rebels was extremely insolent. The Caliph then asked the rebel leaders to prove the charge of authorship of the letter, but they could not substantiate it with any evidence. Highly enraged and incensed, the rebels said, "whether the letter has been written by you or not, in both cases, you are unfit to hold the office of Caliph. You must abdicate."... To this Uthman with a dignity and grandeur of which he had not been thought capable replied, "Abdicate I will not. How can I put off that mantle wherewith the Lord has girded me? Tell me what evils you complain of, and I am ready to rectify them." White-hot with passion, the rebels burst forth, "It is too late to mend. Either abdicate, or our swords will fall heavily on you to force you to do so." To this Uthman's laconic rejoinder was "As to death, I should prefer it, and as to fighting, I loathe it, and I will see that my people refrain from it. Had I wished to fight, I could have called legions to my side who would have battled for me today. But I am unwilling to be the cause of shedding a single drop of blood."

**The Caliph Appeals to the Good Sense of the Rebels.**

By this time the rebels had re-entered Medina and had begun, once again, to undermine the loyalty of the Medinites. They caused lampoons about the Caliph to be read in the streets, ridiculing him in every way.

They mingled with the Medinites in the Mosque and threw dust on the Caliph when he came to lead the prayers. One Friday, after he had ascended the pulpit, the Caliph addressed them thus: "Ye know full well that the holy people of Medina consider you accursed because you have rebelled against the Holy Prophet's vice-regent. The Holy Prophet's prophecy that the damned would gather at the places which you occupy today is coming literally true. Now it is high time for you to atone for your evil deeds by repentance and good actions."

Scarcely had this oration finished when the rebels turned the men of Medina out of the Mosque, showering stones on them as they fled. One of the stones struck the Caliph, who fell unconscious to the ground, and had to be carried to the safety of an adjoining house.

### **The Caliph's House is Besieged**

Daily the tension between the rebels and the Caliph increased. The ever-growing insolence of the rebels compelled the Caliph to shut himself up in his house, which was besieged and in a state of virtual blockade. Ali now made good his vow to defend Uthman, deputing his sons to act as bodyguards for the old Caliph. Ali's friends Talha and Zubair, who had so often fought beside him in the wars of the Holy Prophet also sent their sons to defend the venerable Uthman. These youngmen, the flower of Medinite youth, performed sentinel duty at the door of the Caliph's house. Meanwhile, as there were no reserve troops in Medina, Uthman was compelled to send urgent calls for help and re-inforcement to Syria and Basra.

When the insurgent leaders learned that the Caliph had summoned troops to his aid they immediately sent one of their number to officiate at the Mosque and to lead the congregational prayers in place of Uthman. This act, symbolic of the negation of Uthman's sovereign rights, was intended to convey to the multitude that

Uthman was no longer Caliph in their eyes.

At this turn of events Uthman called Talha, Zubair and Ali into conference and, in the hearing of the rebels said:—

“Fellow brothers, I have prayed for you to God Almighty, that after I am taken away, He may set the affairs of the Caliphate in right order. For ever after the Lord has chosen me as his viceregent, I see that people have risen up to slay the Lord’s elect. Have a care, ye men. The taking of life (in Islam) is lawful only for three things, apostasy, murder and adultery. To take my life without any of these causes, is tantamount to the suspending of a sword over your own necks. You yourselves will never be rid of sedition and bloodshed.”

The insurgents paid no heed to the Caliph’s overtures. On the contrary, they enforced the blockade with double rigour. They cut off the Caliph’s supply of water and rations, so that he suffered from extreme hunger and thirst. Ali, at this juncture, intervened and addressing the rebels said, “You are treating the venerable old Caliph more cruelly than any one would treat the prisoners on the battlefield. Even honourable infidels do not cut off the supply of water to a thirsty enemy.” But Ali’s sermon fell on deaf ears. Umm Habiba (daughter of Abu Sufyan and the widow of the Holy Prophet) who was a cousin of Uthman, tried to carry water on her mule into the Caliph’s house with Ali’s help, but she was roughly handled by the insurgents. They cut her bridle with the sword and forced her to retreat. In great agony the Caliph waited for his end.

### **Martyrdom of Uthman 17 June 656 A.D.**

In the later days of his life the old Caliph showed a courage and stoicism truly remarkable when one reflects with what timidity he had assumed office. The old man who had been too overcome by diffidence to deliver his first Khutba in the Mosque now prepared to meet his end with the calm bravery of a truly religious man

who had resigned himself to the will of God. The years he had spent in the faithful study of the Holy Qur'an now bore fruit and there is no figure in the whole history of Islam who met death with greater courage and dignity. Whatever his faults as a ruler may have been and they were quite a few—it can be truly said of him that nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it.

The blockade lasted for several weeks but still the Caliph refused to abdicate, holding that he had been divinely appointed to his office and that it was not in his power to put off the powers that God had vested in him, and hoping against hope that re-inforcements would reach Medina in time. When rumours began to circulate that help for the Caliph was now near at hand, the rebels decided that they could wait no longer and resolved on an immediate attack. They soon made a clean sweep of the bodyguards, rushed at the Caliph's house, battered it with stones and made preparations to burn it to the ground. Sir William Muir<sup>1</sup> has left the following graphic description of the end of Uthman:—

"Uthman had retired alone into an inner chamber of the women's apartments and there awaiting his fate read from the Qur'an<sup>2</sup> spread out on his knees. Three ruffians sent to fulfil the bloody work, rushed in upon him thus engaged. Awed by his calm demeanour and plaintive appeal, each returned as he went. "It would be murder," they said, "to lay hands upon him thus." Muhammad, son of Abu Bakr, in his hate and rage had no such scruples. Running in, he seized him by the beard, and cried, "The Lord abase thee, thou old dotard!" "Let my beard go", said Uthman calmly; "I am no dotard, but the Caliph, whom they call

1. Sir William Muir—*The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline and Fall*. p. 231-32.

2. When the insurgents burst forth in Uthman's apartment, he was reading the Qur'anic verse Badru's Sughra (the smaller Bedr). This verse refers to Abu Sufyan's announcement at the field of Uhud, when he was going to leave for Mecca, that he would cross swords with the Muslims the following year. But it was an empty threat as he failed to invade Medina the following year. The verse runs:—"Those to whom the people said: Verily men have gathered against you; therefore fear them; but this increased their faith, and they said: Our sufficiency is in God; and most excellent is the protector." (Qur'an 3:172)

Uthman." Then, in answer to a further torrent of abuse, the aged Caliph went on,—“Son of my brother! Thy father would not have served me so. The Lord help me! To Him I flee for refugee from thee.” The appeal touched even the unworthy son of Abu Bakr, and he too retired. The insurgent leaders now impatient, crowded in, smote the Caliph with their swords, and trampled on the Qur'an which he had been reading. He yet had strength enough to gather up the leaves and press them to his bosom, while the blood flowed forth upon the sacred<sup>1</sup> text. Thus attacked, the faithful Na'ila<sup>2</sup> cast herself upon her wounded Lord, and as she shielded him with her arm, a sword cut several of her fingers, which fell upon the ground. The band of slaves attempted his defence. One of them slew the leader, but was immediately himself cut down. Further effort was in vain. The insurgents<sup>3</sup> plunged their weapons into the Caliph's body, and he fell lifeless to the ground.<sup>4</sup> The infuriated mob now had their way. A scene of riot followed. They stabbed the corpse, leaped savagely on it, and were proceeding to cut off the head, when the women screamed, beating their breast and faces, and the savage crew desisted. The house was gutted; and even Naila, all wounded and bloody, was stripped of her veil. Then the cry was raised, “To the Treasury!” and suddenly all departed.”

Von Kremer<sup>5</sup> describes the death of Uthman in the following words:—“After a long negotiation with the Caliph (who was abandoned by his friends and shamefully betrayed by the Ansars and the heirarchical coterie of Medina) the rebels stormed his house and killed the

1. The blood, we are told, flowed down to the words:—If they turn their backs, they are only schismatics; thy Lord will deal with them for you (Qur'an 5:131).

2. Na'ila, (like Maysun, the wife of Mu'awiyah) was a Jacobite Christian who belonged to the Kalb tribe which had settled at the Syro-Arab border.

3. Kinan ibn Bahr al-Tujibi is said to have dealt the mortal and final blow and then others followed suit.

4. The day when Uthman attained martyrdom was Friday the 18th Zulhijja 35 A.H. corresponding to the 17th June 656 A.D.

5. English translation of Von Kremer's *Staatsidee Islams* by Prof. Khuda Bakhsh. Publishers Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore. Ed. 1954 p. 38-39.

aged Caliph, who knew, if not how to live, at least, how to die with honour and dignity. With truth and justice the poet Hassan ibn Thabit thus sang of Uthman:

"The Ansar left him in the lurch when death appeared on the scene, though the Ansar had the power (to help him if they would). Who would acquit, Talha and Zubair of complicity in this tragic affair? Muhammad the son of Abu Bakr, appeared to be the ring leader, and behind him stood 'Ammar ibn Yasir."

### **The Interment of the Body**

The unwashed body of Uthman, stretched out at the door, and trampled upon by the passersby, lay unburied in the house for three days and nights. Then at the instance of Ali, it was laid at dead of night in a grave in a field<sup>4</sup> adjoining the graveyard. As soon as the rebels saw the bier, they pelted it with stones, and it was followed by the curses of the mob who had gathered there.

Thus passed, at the age of eighty-two, Uthman the third of the Caliphs, who, whatever his faults may have been, shared some of the greatest Islamic virtues that had been mirrored in the life of the Holy Prophet. Uthman had always shown the greatest love and clemency towards the true Believers in Faith and even in his dying hours he would not draw his sword for fear of spilling Muslim blood. He offered his own life as an example to posterity to avoid shedding blood and in the hope that, by so doing, Civil War would be avoided. Posterity was to make a mockery of that sacrifice.

4. According to Wellhausen, the body of Uthman was buried in a Jewish graveyard because of fear the Ansars of Medina would not intern it in a Muslim cemetery. But this is not warranted by facts. It is not probable that a religious-minded man like Ali, who conducted the funeral and interned the corpse would have ever agreed to its interment in a Jewish graveyard. (Vide the English translation of Wellhausen's work. *The Arab Kingdom and its fall*, by Margaret Graham, published by the University of Calcutta in 1927 p. 30.)

**The Political Results of Uthman's Assassination**

"The murder of Uthman" says Wellhausen, "was more epoch-making than almost any other event of Islamic history. From that time the question to whom the leadership of the theocracy belonged was fought out with swords. The Janus—gate of civil war was opened and never again closed. The unity of Muhammad's congregation, represented by the Imam at the head, could be, at the most, outwardly maintained by force: in reality the Jamaa broke up and split into faction, which always tried to break down each other's policies and to take up arms for their Imam against the Imam actually in power. It was a painful dilemma for the pious. If they held back they ran against the command strongly emphasised by Islam to show the colours and enlist by word or deed for the right, and if they took sides they were disregarding the fundamental hypothesis of the theocracy, that the believers must not spill their own blood or fight amongst themselves, but only against infidels. The question "What say ye to the murder of Uthman? distracted their minds."

**The Domination of the Meccan Quraish**

The martyrdom of Uthman was to result ultimately in a victory for the Meccan Quraish over the Orthodox Medinites and, in particular, for the Umayyad party in Mecca over the Hashimites who had hitherto dominated Medina. With the martyrdom of Uthman the sanctity of the Caliphate had gone and, with it, the special place of Medina as the capital of the Caliphate. Until now the Caliphate of Muhammad's successors had rested on the strength and zeal of the masses but now the Islamic fraternity was to become pitifully divided amongst itself. Under the pretext of maintaining law and order the Umayyads went ceaselessly to work to set the Medinites against their Hashimite leaders and while paying lip service to Islam, to cast the very principles

of the Islamic Commonwealth to the winds.

In place of the old Islamic society based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, there was now to arise a powerful monarchy, a dominating class of nobles and a society riddled with immorality. The old orthodoxy which had rested on the foundations of piety, equality, and the selfless personality of the Caliph was to give way to lax morals, favouritism, and luxurious court. Thus, while apparently remaining in the fold, these victors were to betray the cause for which they pretended to fight. Every blow they were to strike to achieve power would turn out to be a blow at Islam.

Meanwhile, immediately after the murder of Uthman, terror and chaos reigned. Who would be chosen as his successor? Who, indeed, would be brave enough to assume that role? The whole of Islam was torn by bitterness and dissension. No Caliph would ever again be able to rely on the unanimous support of the Believers in Faith. One man alone had popular acclaim, he alone might be deemed great enough to hold Islam together at this tragic time. That man was Ali, a Hashimite and a man of Medina. The Umayyads could afford to bide their time. Meanwhile Ali reluctantly allowed himself to be appointed Uthman's successor; thus becoming the Fourth—and last—of the Orthodox Caliphs.



PART I

ALI THE CALIPH (656-661 A.D.)

Falsehood hath so corrupted all the world  
That wrangling sects each other's gospel chide,  
But were not hate Man's natural element  
Churches and Mosques had arisen side by side.

(Abdu'l-Ala al-Ma'arri)



## CHAPTER VIII

### ELECTION

#### **Four Days of Terror in Medina**

After the murder of Uthman, the rebels, who had gained complete mastery of Medina established a reign of terror. Chaos and confusion prevailed, the machinery of government had come to a standstill and those Muslims who had been loyal to Uthman went in fear of their lives. Those Medinites who could manage to get away from the capital, fled to Mecca, Damascus or to other provincial towns; those who were unable to escape shut themselves up within the four walls of their houses until the rebel fury had spent itself.

Among those who fled to Damascus to seek refuge with Mu'awiya, governor of Syria and cousin of Uthman, were some of the Umayyad relatives of the murdered Caliph. According to the authors of *Rouza-tu-Safa* and *Habib-us-Sayar*, these included among their number Numan bin Besheir, Abdullah, the son of the late Caliph Umar the Great, Muhammad bin Mosselmah, Hussaun, and Zaid Thaubet, Soheyb bin Sennaun and Kaub bin Malik. They are said to have taken with them the blood-stained robes of Uthman and the chopped-off fingers of Na'ila and to have delivered them to Mu'awiya. Later, when things had quietened down throughout the country these refugees withdrew to Mecca where they found a welcome ally in Aisha, the widow of the Holy Prophet.

Meanwhile in Medina the atrocities continued. For four days after the ghastly murder the rebels gave

free rein to unbridled lust, savage rapine, loot and plunder. On the fifth day, hearing that help for the Medinites was now near at hand and fearing for their own safety, they ceased their terrorist activities and began to think of electing a successor to Uthman. This they now had to do in a great hurry as they were anxious to withdraw from Medina, before the troops from the provinces arrived.

### **Ali is Offered the Caliphate**

Each of the three rebel bands had a different candidate to put forward. The people of Basra favoured the election of Talha, the men of Kufa favoured Zubair, while the Egyptian leader, Ashtar, wanted Ali to become Caliph. In spite of the extreme urgency of the situation the rebels were unable to come to a unanimous decision until Ashtar took matters into his own hands and threatened the leaders of the other two bands with death if they failed to see eye to eye with him in regard to election. Ashtar then put forward the case of Ali, enquiring of them where they could find a better man than Ali, who in scholarship, knowledge, wisdom, piety, bravery and political sagacity, stood head and shoulders above his rivals. Having secured their approval, Ashtar then went to Ali to offer him the Caliphate, saying, "Stretch forth thy hand for I intended to offer you my allegiance." Ali hesitated, but Ashtar continued to urge acceptance upon him. "Diplomacy", he persisted, "urges that you should accept the allegiance." Ali was again silent. "Failing to do as you are bidden could cost you your life," said the leader of the regicides. Even this threat failed to move Ali. What finally prevailed upon him to accept the unwanted sovereignty was the patent need for someone to impose order on the confusion that prevailed in Medina. None of the people knew what to do or to whom they might turn and the unity of the Islamic Commonwealth was being hourly disrupted.

Reverend Simon Ockley<sup>1</sup> describes Ali's reluctant acceptance of the Caliphate as follows:—

“In this confusion several of the candidates came to Ali, desiring him to accept the government. Upon his excusing himself and assuring them that he had no wish for the dignity, but was quite ready to give his consent to the election of any other person on whom their choice should fall, they insisted that there was none so well qualified as he, whether he were considered with regard to his personal accomplishments, or his near relationship to the Holy Prophet. But to all their remonstrances he still replied that he had much rather serve any other whom they should think fit to choose, in the capacity of Vizier, than take the government upon himself.

Ali being thus obstinate in his refusal, and all those of the family of Umayya, (of whom more hereafter) that had an opportunity, having in the meantime withdrawn themselves, the greater part of the men from the several provinces, who however well-satisfied they were with the murder of Uthman were highly displeased at this difficulty in the choice of his successor, assembled together, and came in a tumultuous body to Medina. Addressing themselves to the chief inhabitants, they told them that they were the proper persons to determine this controversy, adding that they would allow them one day to consider over it, in which time, if it were not concluded, Talha, Zubair, and Ali and several others, would be put to the sword. Upon this the people of Medina came to Ali in the evening, earnestly entreating him to consider the condition of their religion. But as he still declined to accept the Caliphate, and desired them to think of some other person, they said, “We adjure thee by God! Dost not thou consider in what condition we are? Dost not thou consider the religion? Dost not thou consider the distraction of the people? Dost thou not fear God?”. Overcome at last with these pathetic expostulations he answered, “If you will excuse

1. Simon—Ockley—History of the Sarcens. p. 288-90. Publishers Henry G. Bohn, London, Edition, 1848.

me, there shall be no other difference between you and me but this, that, whosoever you may set over me, I will prove myself one of his most submissive and obedient subjects, but if not, and I must comply with your wishes in this matter, then I will deal with you according to the best of my knowledge." When, upon these words, they preferred to give him their hands (the form then in use among them upon such occasions), at his own house he resolved not to accept of their allegiance in private, requiring them to go through the ceremony publicly at the mosque,<sup>1</sup> in order that all parties might be satisfied, and have no just cause of complaint. For Ali was apprehensive of the disloyalty of Aishah, Talha, Zubair and the whole house of Umayya (of which Mu'awiya, Uthman's lieutenant in Syria was Chief) who, he knew, would avail themselves of every opportunity to oppose and disturb his government. In the

1. According to the Persian Sources, especially Rouza-tu-Safa, Habib-us-Sayr and Kholasa-tu'l-Akhbar, three days after the murder of Uthman, the Egyptian leader made overtures to Ali to assume sovereignty, in view of the calamities which threatened the disruption of the Empire. Ali is said to have remarked at this occasion that the leader of the regicides was not a proper person in authority to confer the Caliphate on any one and that this prerogative was the exclusive right of the Majalis-i-Shura (Council of the Elders) and the entire Muslim nation at large. After Ali's refusal a deputation of the Mediniter waited on him, and dwelt on the extraordinary qualifications of Ali which singled him out for the election of a Caliph. The deputation then implored Ali to acquiesce in the general will of the people. To this Ali replied, "I aspired to the Caliphate after the death of Umar and wanted to regulate the happiness of the Faithful but it was only an ambition that I gave up long ago. However, if you insist I am prepared to accept a second place, that of a Vizier". The Medinites still persisted in their entreaties and bringing in the name of Islam said, "Should you still shilly-shally over accepting the charges of this onerous office at this juncture, and fail to save the solidarity of faith, we will hold you responsible before God on the Day of Judgment." It was then that Ali agreed, but, said he, "It is impossible to decide in the absence of Talha and Zubair. Accordingly both were sent for to join the deliberations but they sent a message in which they regretted their inability to attend the conference but promised not to withhold their pledge of allegiance. The implications of such a reply were only too well understood by the audience and the regicide leader once again commanded them to attend. This time they obeyed the summons of the Commander of the rebels and came to the conference. Both were then asked if they had any pretensions towards the Caliphate and both replied—in the hearing of all those present—that they knew of no one whose qualifications could in any way compete with those of Ali. They then publicly swore allegiance to Ali and acclaimed him as the Caliph and congratulated him for having been appointed as God's Pontiff.

We will see later on how both of these magnates rebelled against Ali, and took their stand on the argument that allegiance was extracted from them under coercion which was not binding on them.

morning, therefore, he went to the mosque, dressed in a thin cotton gown, tied about with a girdle, and having a coarse turban upon his head, with his slippers in one hand and a bow in the other instead of a walking staff. Talha and Zubair not being present, he ordered them to be sent for. When they came, they offered him their hands as a mark or token of their approbation. Upon this, Ali assured them that if either of them would accept the government, he was quite content, and would give them his hand in perfect sincerity. This, however, they both declined, and gave him theirs. The hand that Talha offered to Ali had been very much shattered and maimed by some wounds which he had received in the war. One of the bystanders perceiving this (the Eastern nations being generally addicted to superstition, are great observers of omens), remarked that it was a bad sign; that it was like to be but a lame sort of business that was begun with a lame hand. How far that presage was fulfilled will best appear from the remaining history of Ali."

### **Ali is elected Caliph**

On the fifth day after the fatal tragedy of Uthman's murder, Ali was elected to rule "according to the Book of God" on 24th June 656 A.D. Hailing him as Caliph, the men of Medina paid him homage; following this the oath of allegiance was taken by the regicides from Egypt, Kufa and Basra who were present in great numbers in the capital. These men came forward in groups to take the oath of fealty. After paying homage to their new Caliph, the three bands of rebels made ready to return home, hopeful that law and order might now prevail. They had come to Medina to obtain redress for their grievances and now that they believed their work to have been satisfactorily accomplished, many of them departed to their respective homes. Some of them, however, who had supported rival candidates for the Caliphate, lingered on in Medina, waiting to revive

the differences of opinion and to exploit them for their own ends.

In Mecca too, the enemies of Ali were by no means reconciled to his appointment as Caliph. During the taking of the oath of allegiance the Meccans had been conspicuously absent but Ali, magnanimous as always, did not compel them to pay homage. This dispensation, typical of Ali's desire to promote peace in Islam, may well have been misinterpreted by his less zealous opponents as a sign of weakness on his part and certainly it did nothing to assuage their disaffection. Also absent from Medina at the time of Ali's election were those powerful Umayyads who had fled from the rebels and their atrocities to Syria. They were to return to Mecca, now that the immediate dangers were past, there to plot with Aishah, the favourite wife of the Holy Prophet for his overthrow.

### **The Great Issue of the Succession**

Ali's election has been viewed from many different angles by Muslim writers belonging to different sects and even to-day, after a lapse of thirteen hundred and fifty years it is as debatable a point as ever it was. Unfortunately it has not remained an academic problem. On the contrary, it has led to endless party strife and to the division of Islam into many sects: the Sunnis, the Shias, and the Kharjites. Worse still, the hatred of one sect for another has led to numerous wars, each fought in the name of God. Because of the martyrdom of Ali and the tragic sufferings of his family the Shi'ites, with their outrageous doctrines of the Apostolic succession of the Imams, the Karmathians with their nefarious and murderous revolutionary preachings and the Ismailians with their mysterious doctrines of the incarnation of the Deity, have waged continual warfare against the government of the Sunni Caliphs. Added to this the persecuting proclivities of the Assassins of Alamout, the detestable atrocities of the Druse (the dwellers of the Libanon)

and many other minor sects and one can begin to understand the appalling nature of the schisms that have developed within the Faith. Even in our own times, year in and year out, at the beginning of the Muslim year in the sacred month of Muharam, the Shias curse the memory of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, whom they depict as self-seeking tyrants who usurped the rights of Ali.

The problem of the successor became all the more complicated because the Holy Prophet neither named a successor nor left any will. There was no clear-cut law amongst the Arabs in regard to the succession, for they had never been united under one leader until the arrival of the Holy Prophet. All they could do was to let themselves be guided by their ancient tribal laws and traditions, which usually followed some pattern of election on the basis of seniority rather than heredity, but which varied from tribe to tribe, hereditary succession being not unknown amongst them. To further complicate matters rivalry existed between the "Ansars" or 'Helpers' of Medina and the "Muhajars" or 'Emigrants' from Mecca, both loudly and repeatedly asserting their claims to be the more devout and zealous followers of the Holy Prophet.

At the so-called "Election" of Abu Bakr, Ali was not present, as he was engaged with the funeral rites of the Holy Prophet at the time. Indeed it was some days before Ali paid Abu Bakr the customary homage, a delay which suggests that he had felt himself cheated of the Caliphate. This is the view held by the Shi'ite chroniclers but no factual data of history can be brought forward in support of this view. At no time did Ali stand as a candidate for the office.

It seems highly probable that Abu Bakr was elected simply because he was the best man for the job, because of his seniority, his age and ripe experience—always having been deferred to in the Eastern countries—and because of his political sagacity, cool judgment and even temper, all qualities which the younger Ali still needed

to develop to the full. As Freeman<sup>1</sup> says:—

“Probably, after all, Ali would not have been the right man in the right place. Brave, just, merciful, chivalrous in the best sense, Ali was clearly wanting in the political sagacity of Abu Bakr and Umar. It is impossible not to sympathise with Ali and his partisans, yet it is clear that it was not without reason that the father-in-law of the Holy Prophet was preferred to his son-in-law, the father of Aishah to the husband of Fatima.”

The Shi'ites further hold that the election of Abu Bakr was unconstitutional, illegal and irregular, a tumultuous farce of a plebiscite, held in great haste by the Medinites so as to settle the matter themselves, without consulting the opinions of the rest of the Muslims in the Arabian peninsula and without any regard to the true nominee of the Holy Prophet himself. Indeed the succession was settled by a single act of Umar who, pledging his allegiance to Abu Bakr, carried the day in his favour. The moment had been a critical one and Abu Bakr and Umar had no intention of repeating such a perilous experiment. For this reason Umar saw to it that Abu Bakr left a will, bequeathing him the Caliphate on his death-bed.

It must further be remembered that, in addition to the rivalry between the “Ansars” and the “Muhajirs”, there was that other rivalry among Quraish themselves, between the aristocratic Umayyads, and the Hashimites, which threatened the solidarity of Islam even before the murder of Uthman.

The Umayyads were averse to the very principle of election. Theirs had for quite some time been the dominant position in Arabian affairs, they had exercised a feudal and aristocratic power and they had no intention of seeing that power passed into other hands, without dispute. It is sometimes suggested that Umar would have nominated Ali as his successor but for the hostile attitude of the Umayyad Quraish. Umar had therefore been compelled to leave the choice of his

1. Edward. A. Freeman—History and conquests of the Saracens. p. 64.

successor to the six members of the "Majlis-i-Shura" (the council of the Elders), that famous conclave of six who, under pain of death, had been enjoined by him to elect his successor within three days of his death.

Ali's origin was indeed humble but his character was not. Having been ruled by one autocrat—the domineering Umar—the Elders were now loath to give their vote to another strong personality. They consequently selected Uthman a weakling who they felt would give them no trouble and who would become a puppet in their hands.

The assassination of Uthman ushered in a dark period of internal dissension, during which time all the old enmities erupted. Uptill the election of Ali, the Caliph elected in Medina had been accepted as *de facto* Caliph throughout the Islamic Commonwealth, irrespective of the form of election which he had gone through. During Uthman's reign, however, the Muslim provinces had greatly increased in strength and they were beginning to demand a say in the central government. It was for this reason that the rebels had come to Medina before the Assassination and for this reason that they had urged now thrust the Caliphate on Ali.

Mu'awiya, the governor of Syria and cousin to Uthman, represented the interest, not of the Islamic Commonwealth but of the Umayyad Quraish. He immediately refused to acknowledge Ali as Caliph, the starting-point of a series of attempts, some effective and some abortive, by the provincial governors to convert the vicarship of the Holy Prophet into a hereditary line. It must be remembered, at this point, that all the provincial governors were Umayyad relatives of the murdered Caliph and interested in securing the succession for the Umayyads; while the partisans of Ali saw Ali as the only legitimate hereditary claimant.

Meanwhile, what of Ali? The student of history is baffled. Why did Ali, whose claims were far superior to those of his predecessors, acquiesce so meekly when those claims were repeatedly ignored? It will always

remain an enigma. As Freeman<sup>1</sup> so rightly, observes:—

“The two fathers-in-law of the Holy Prophet, for Umar held that place as well as Abu Bakr, commanded an allegiance which never fell to the lot of his sons-in-law, Uthman and Ali. Ali clearly felt himself wronged by the three successive elections to his prejudice, but he did not allow his disappointment to hinder a true and dutiful allegiance to his successful rivals.”

Indeed a true and selfless devotion to the principles of Islam remained the most probable of all possible interpretations.

### **The Shi'ite View on the Succession by Heredity**

At the time of his election Ali had his partisans but they had, for the most part, asked him to accept the Caliphate for reasons of diplomacy and expediency rather than from theoretical motives. The theories about Ali were to develop later. As time went on, the followers of Ali, who came to be known as “Alids”, or “Shian-i-Ali” and the actual descendants of Ali called “Ahl-i-Biat” began to hold quite a different view of the succession from that of the “Traditionalists” or “Ahl-a-Sunnat-wal-Jamiat”. The Alids began to assert that the problem of succession was not a secular thing which could be left to a plebiscite of the common people. The succession was a spiritual matter, and one of such importance to the religion of Islam that it was impossible that the Holy Prophet could have neglected to pronounce on it. How could the Apostle of God have left such a vital issue to the choice of the community? One of the most important duties incumbent upon the Holy Prophet had been the appointment of his successor, a man who had to be free from all sins and temptations. This man had been Ali, the first Imam or successor appointed specifically by the Holy Prophet to take office after his death. Belief in this appointment was later to

<sup>1</sup> L. Edward. A. Freeman—*The History and Conquests of the Saracens*. p. 66. Publishers, Macmillan & Co. London, Edition 1876.

be exalted into an additional Pillar of Religion.

In support of this thesis the Shias quote very many "Hadiths" or "Traditions" of the Holy Prophet, especially the Khutba of Ghadir Khum in which he had referred to Ali as his "Successor." As a corollary to this proposition they point Ali as being the "Wasi" or 'Executor' of the Holy Prophet's will. Ali, the only nominee of the Holy Prophet, was therefore, in their eyes, the only legal successor to the Holy Prophet and the only person with the right to select his successor in due turn. When Ali left the Caliphate to his son Hasan, Hasan became in turn the only legal successor and when Hasan abdicated in favour of Mu'awiya, he was being cheated out of a sacred trust. It was for that reason that Hussain, the younger brother of Hasan, refused to pay homage to Mu'awiya's son Yezid, and chose to die on the battlefield of Kerbala rather than to betray the principle of succession by selection as evinced by Ali's choice of his elder son. This "selection" was later to be interpreted as hereditary succession by later Shi'ite jurists.

This later development of the Shi'ite views on the Succession has been well summarised by the Western writer Sedellot who says, from his detached and objective post of vantage:—

"Had the principle of hereditary succession (in favour of Ali) been recognised at the outset, it would have prevented the rise of those disastrous pretensions which engulfed Islam in the blood of Muslims.... the husband of Fatima united in his person the right of succession as the lawful heir of the Holy Prophet, as well as the right by election. It might have been thought that all would submit themselves before his glory, so pure and so grand. But it was not to be."

Later on, the Shi'ites supplemented their theory of hereditary rights by insisting, with all the vehemence of the partisan spirit, that Ali, in asserting the hereditary rights of his offspring, was actually asserting the claims of the Holy Prophet's descendants. Conceding, the

argument went, that the caliphate might be allotted to the worthiest of the faithful, then it might still become hereditary, for the Holy Prophet's descendants might be expected to be the fittest to rule. But at no time could Muhammad (may peace be upon him) have imagined that it would become hereditary in the house of his bitterest enemies, the Umayyads. Even after the assassination of Ali, when his son, Hasan, the grandson of the Holy Prophet surrendered his claims to Mu'awiyah, it was expressly stipulated in the treaty that the latter would not appoint any successor and that if Hasan survived Mu'awiyah, he should resume his sovereign and hereditary powers. Mu'awiyah ignored the terms of this treaty by poisoning Hasan and securing the nomination of his own son, Yezid, who was no relation whatsoever of the Holy Prophet, and that too at the point of sword.

### **Ali Opposes Hereditary Succession**

The contentions of the Shi'ites that the succession was hereditary are not substantiated by the facts. Ali himself never, at any time in his life, laid any claim to the succession on the grounds of hereditary rights. When offered sovereignty by the Egyptian leader, Ashtar, Ali declined to accept the offer, because this proposal infringed the elective principles and constitutional rights of the people. Ali's view on the succession can best be gleaned from his sermon No. 174<sup>1</sup> "On the Caliphate", which he delivered before the people when Mu'awiyah contested the Caliphate:—

"Muhammad (may peace be upon him) is the trustee of the revelation of God. He is the last of all the prophets. He gives the good news of the mercy of God and frightens the people with His punishments. O People! He who is the most powerful of all and who knows the Book of God best of all deserves the Caliphate.

<sup>1</sup>. *Najh-al-Balgha* by Muhammad Ali Saliman. p. 150. Publishers Ghulam Ali & Sons, Lahore.

Now<sup>1</sup> if any person creates sedition, first I will try to dissuade him from it, but if he does not refrain from it, I shall fight against him. *By God! the question of the caliphate cannot be settled unless all the people are present and are unanimous over it*; but the persons deciding the question of the Caliphate plead for him also who is absent. Now neither can the present person go against his word, nor can the absent person adopt any other course. Beware! I will fight against two persons: the first person is he who claims the caliphate although he does not deserve it; the second is he who abstains from doing those things which are incumbent upon him. I advise you to fear God. This is the best piece of advice for the people. Its ultimate result will be very good. . . .”

### **Some Objective Opinions on the Succession**

The Shi'ite chroniclers and the Sunni chroniclers have continued to present interpretations which remained at variance. Throughout the long and painful history of the Schism other Muslim writers have contributed opinions which have also been imbued with partisan feeling. Indeed it is well-nigh impossible for a Muslim writer to give an objective, detached view of the problem of the Succession, totally uncoloured by prejudice. Before closing this chapter the reader may care to study the opinions of some Western writers who are, in the nature of things, less inclined to bias. Three outstanding authorities on the subject have been chosen, covering, together, a wide field of Arabic scholarship

First, an extract from Professor<sup>1</sup> Lane-Poole, who observes as follows:—

“It was the common report that Ali would succeed Muhammad as the leader of Islam, and when the Prophet died it was a surprise to the Muslims that he had not named Ali as the First Caliph. Without such express appointment the post was sure to be contested;

1. Stanley Lane-Poole—*Studies in a Mosque*. p. 213-14. Publishers Eden, Remington & Co. London. Edition 1893.

and the jealousies of certain families and political parties; the seniority of other chief men, and the hatred of Aishah, Muhammad's favourite wife, whom Ali with some reason had suspected of an intrigue, combined to exclude him from the supreme power, which had not been specially entrusted to him by the Prophet; and for which his near kinship with Muhammad constituted no claim. It is a mistake into which many writers, following Shi'ite legends, had fallen, to commiserate with Ali as the lawful Caliph deprived of his rights by the usurpers. There were no rights in the case. However such a sentiment of reverence for the family of their Prophet may have inclined the early Muslims to prefer them to other claimants, there was no doctrine of heredity established at the time of Ali. The election to the office of Caliph, or chief of the religion and the state, was vested in the whole body of the Faithful, and with certain restrictions was open to any candidate who might offer himself. The prime qualification was not near kinship to the Prophet but the capacity to rule—the strong will, the wakeful energy, the prudence, the diplomatic skill which could alone maintain order in the mixed and rebellious empire which Muhammad had united by his supreme influence, but which was now threatening to break up into its original divisions. The bold resolute Umar was undoubtedly the fitter man for this difficult position than the mere shrinking and scrupulous Ali, and Muhammad's old friend Abu Bakr had also, by his age and the respect in which he was held by all men, as well as by his wise, conciliating spirit, a valid title to the supreme voice. The people did well to prefer these men to Ali who assuredly was not made of the stuff whereof conquering kings are fashioned. But when these were gone, and the feeble Uthman, the tool of the enemies of Ali, had met his death, there was no one so highly esteemed among the original supporters of Muhammad as his adopted son, and we may be sure that the fact of his being the husband of the Prophet's daughter, Fatima, and the father of

Hasan and Hussain, the favourites of their late grandfather, and now his sole male representatives, did not tell against Ali and in 655 A.D. he became the fourth Caliph of Islam."

Professor Hitti,<sup>1</sup> in a discussion of the views of the Muslim legists on the appointment of a Caliph (or successor to the Prophet) and the qualifications they considered to be requisite says, "The Sunnite (orthodox) theory lists the following caliphal qualifications; membership in the Quraish family, being male and adult, soundness of body and mind, courage, energy and other traits of character necessary for the defence of the realm; and the winning of the allegiance of the community by an act of "bay'ah". The Shi'ah, on the other hands, who make less of the Caliphate and more of the Imamate, confine the office to the family of Ali, whom they hold was nominated by Muhammad as his successor on the basis of a divine ordinance (nass) and whose qualifications passed on to his descendants preordained for the high office by Allah. Among the Caliphal functions, according to the Sunnite school are: protection, maintenance of the faith and the territory of Islam (particularly the two sacred places—al-haramayn—of Mecca and Medina) and in case of necessity—the declaration of a holy war (Jihad), appointment of state officials, collection of taxes and administration of public funds; punishment of wrong doing and the execution of justice. The privileges include the mention of the Caliph's name in the Friday "Khutba" and on the coinage, the wearing of the "Burdah" (the Prophet's mantle) on important state occasions, the custody of such holy relics as the staff, seal, shoe, tooth and hair that are said to have been Muhammad's."

Professor Alfred Guillaume<sup>2</sup> sums up both Shi'ite and Sunnite views as follows:—

"The Shia now began to elaborate their specific

1. Professor P.K. Hitti—History of the Arabs. p. 185. Publishers Macmillan & Co., Edition 1949.

2. Alfred Guillaume—Islam. p. 117-118. Penguin Books. Ed. 1954.

doctrines. First of all they rejected the principle of the consensus of the community, and substituted for it the doctrine that there was an infallible Imam in every age to whom alone God entrusted the guidance of his servants... The Shia taught that the faithful must believe in all the Imams, and especially in the Imam of their own time. This belief was exalted into an additional 'Pillar of Islam'. Among Sunnis the Caliph is the head of the community, responsible for the administration of justice through the Shari'a, and for the defence of the realm of Islam, and he owes his office either to the choice of the community or to the nomination of his predecessor. Not so the Imam of the Shias. He is the divinely appointed ruler and teacher of the faithful who has succeeded to the prerogatives of the Prophet himself. He possesses super-human qualities which descend to him from the first man, Adam, through Muhammad, a divine light which is given to chosen mortals from generation to generation. In popular beliefs which survive in some places to this day, the Imam's body throws no shadow and he cannot be physically harmed.

Among the extravagances of some of the Shia cults which still live on is the belief that Ali and the Imams are incarnation of Godhead, partakers of His attributes and powers, their bodies being but accidents inseparable from their invisible forms.

### **Facts not Theory**

Further time spent on theorisation will get the reader nowhere. Let us now turn to the next chapter and see what manner of Caliph Ali became, what were some of the chief events at the beginning of his unwilling reign and how these events may be truly and unemotionally interpreted in the light of historical facts.

## CHAPTER IX

### SCHISM

#### **Ali's Seat, a bed of thorns**

Ali's assumption of sovereign powers opened a new chapter in the history of Islam—His was a period which witnessed internal dissension within the ranks of Islam, and internecine warfare without, in which the provincial governors, the local magnates of note, the political leaders of the divergent factions, and the theologians of Islam all took part. Ali soon found his seat a bed of thorns. Sedition and rebellion faced him at home and abroad. Law and order gave way to treason and anarchy. Bands of Bedouines pillaged the suburbs of Medina, and the cry of vengeance for the fallen Caliph arose from every quarter. The "Jama's" (Community of Believers) which, under the Holy Prophet, had presented a united front, was now rent into two major factions and the solidarity which had been one of the foundations of Islam, became a thing of the past.

#### **A Conflict of Ideologies**

The conflict between the two hostile camps was bitter and long before, the reign of Uthman but their rivalry became much more pronounced after Uthman's assassination and the accession of Ali was a pretext for bringing the struggle into the open. As Von Kremer<sup>1</sup> so rightly observes:—

1. Von Kremer—*Staatsidee des Islams*. Translation by Professor Khuda Bakhsh under the name "Politics in Islam." Page 39. Publishers Sheikh Mohammad Ashraf, Lahore, Edition 1954.

"But this idea (of favouritism) brought the Caliph (Uthman) not only into collision with the idea of equality and brotherhood of all Muslims, but also into collision with the Muhajirin (Muslims who had emigrated to Medina) and Ansars (local Muslim helpers of Medina), who felt deeply and sorely aggrieved and injured by it. The Muhajirin and Ansar had fought the battles of Islam; they had shared the joys and sorrows of the Prophet—in fact, with their blood had Islam been securely and surely established. Now they had to retire into the background, and to see the Meccans come to the forefront—the very Meccans who only under compulsion had acknowledged the Qur'an, and upon many of whom had rested the curses of the Prophet. Thus the hierarchical clique of Medina came into fierce conflict with the aristocratic party of Mecca. This Medinite clique had the confidence of the masses, who were deeply imbued with religious ardour. At the head of this clique stood Ali."

Ali, now not only the chosen favourite of the Medina party but also the Caliph of all Islam, could not fail to be aware of the dangers implicit in the intrigues of the Meccans. His one concern after his accession was how he might best achieve and maintain unity in the Islamic Commonwealth.

### **Ali Appeals for Unity in Islam**

In an attempt to unite the "Jama'a" (Community) he made an appeal to the congregation in the Mosque. In this address<sup>1</sup> he made clear what his own position was and what the people might best do to serve Islam:—

"Brethren! I am well aware of what you say. Wherefore have I the power to wreak vengeance (on the regicides). The exact position is that the rebels who have invaded (Medina) and killed Uthman still reign supreme in the Capital. How can I overwhelm such

1. Nahj-ul-Balagha, Sermon No. 19j p. 1120. Publishers, Ghulam Ali & Sons, Lahore Edition 1956.

a number and such a considerable force? Beware! The regicides have made your soldiers a pawn in their game. The wild Bedouine and your rampant slaves have made a common cause with these rebels. The murderers are not outside, but inside, amongst us. They have not gone out of Medina and we are still at their mercy. Do you think that we can overpower them? No, they are beyond our control. Undoubtedly the ghastly tragedy has been perpetrated through sheer folly, and the regicides did not lack support. When the people will take them to task they will be divided into three great sections:—

(1) A party will come into existence that will see eye to eye with us;

(2) The members of the next party that will come into being will be poles apart from us;

(3) Another party will be born that will follow neither one line nor the other.

Have patience then until such time as law and order are established, and peace reigns supreme in the country once again. Wait for the time when rights will be restored with ease and facility. Obey my orders. Do not do anything which might break your solidarity and, weakening you, might lead to your ruination. I will try my best to mend and settle things in a pleasant way. Failing this, I will resort to drastic measures. Remember that if a boil is not cured by the application of ointment, it becomes imperative to have an operation, and to amputate the unnecessary part of the diseased limb."

### **Ali's Adherence to Islamic Principles**

Ali's scrupulous adherence to the principles of Islam now began to prove detrimental to his own interests. The masses demanded a scapegoat for the murder of Uthman but Ali could not find any one culprit whom he could justifiably prosecute for the murder. No single person had killed Uthman, it had been an act of mob violence. It had been a mob that had broken into the

palace of Uthman, and done the ghastly deed. Ali's conscience would not allow him to lay the charge of murder at any one's door, when he himself was not sure of the real culprit. When Uthman's wife, Na'ila, who had lost her fingers while defending her husband, was asked to identify the murderers, she replied "I cannot identify any one. There were several persons who had entered the house. The only person about whom I could be sure was Muhammad, son of the late Caliph Abu Bakr. When Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr was interrogated, he replied, "Certainly I entered Uthman's palace, but I did not kill him. When I caught hold of his beard, the Caliph's words 'Had Abu Bakr been alive this day, he would not have handled me so roughly', brought remorse to me and I left the palace without committing any crime."

No definite charge of murder could be brought against any one particular rebel and it is probable that even the rebel mob that had forcibly entered the house of the Old Caliph, did not know the name of the man, or men, who had actually killed Uthman. Nevertheless Ali's failure to charge any one with the crime began to thin the number of his followers.

### **The Widening Schism**

Ali acted most handsomely after his accession and in the fullest accordance with the Islamic principles, but the people refused his invitation to follow in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet and unite. If Ali erred at all it was on the side of too great a leniency, his anxiety to avoid reprisals against his opponents having its roots in his desire to preserve the unity of Islam. It is possible that his opponents misinterpreted his forbearance as a sign of weakness for, less zealous and less magnanimous than he, they were to lose little time before taking up arms against him. The old tribal sectionalism was once again asserting itself; the rift between the parties gaped ever wider and nothing, it seemed, could now avert the

threatening disaster.

### **A Clean Sweep**

With his position so precarious, Ali now decided to take drastic measures. His first political step, after his assumption of sovereign powers, was to depose all the provincial governors whom Uthman had appointed. This was done partly to pacify the rebels, who continued to hover round the metropolis, partly because the governors had shown themselves palpably lacking in the Islamic virtues, and partly because they had become altogether too powerful. Taking advantage of the weak rule of Uthman, the governors had become almost semi-independent in their own provinces and were therefore in a strong position to defy the new central authority. By making a clean sweep of Uthman's unpopular relations, Ali hoped to re-assert the supremacy of Medina. It was to prove an imprudent policy.

### **A Rash and Hasty Step**

The deposition of the governors was a step against which Ali had been specifically advised by no less a person than Moghaira bin Shaiubah. Moghaira, who was considered the wisest of the Arabs, endeavoured to prevail upon Ali to bide his time and to wait until he had seen how his accession had been viewed by the people in the different provinces. The wise old counsellor feared that any premature action might lead to upheavals in the Islamic Commonwealth, but Ali refused to countenance his suggestions for a more moderate and less hasty approach to the issue. Seeing that further argument would be fruitless, Moghaira left Ali, saying that he would again come the following day, by which time he hoped the Caliph would have re-considered the proposals. When he returned next day, however, it was Moghaira who had changed his mind, saying, "Despite what I suggested to you yesterday, I advise

you today to take a different course. You should depose the governors at once, so that you may feel at ease."

Ali's cousin, Abdullah ibn al-Abbas also joined in the deliberations, coming specially from Mecca to see Ali. Unlike Moghaira, he remained unshaken in his belief that Ali ought to retain the governors, at least for the time being. "Since" argued Abbas, "the semi-despotic government of the provinces is run, not from any policy of high motives, but for self-gratification and private ambition, these officials will remain loyal to the central authority as long as they are retained in power. While a governor is in office, it matters little to him who is the Caliph. Should you depose him, at this juncture, when you are not safe in the saddle, he will sow discord, question the legality of your election, and will stoop to propagate the calumnious reports that either you are an active accomplice, or at least an abettor, in the murder of Uthman. Your enemies will further argue that because of the old hostility that exists between us and the Umayyads, you are taking vengeance by extirpating the family of the Umayyad. It will not be difficult for these governors to stir up Iraq, Syria, and the entire Arabian peninsula into rebellion, especially as no confidence can be placed in the allegiance of Talha and Zubair, whose oath of fealty was taken so hurriedly and, indifferently. At any rate retain Mu'awiya in Syria and remember that it was Umar the Great, and not Uthman who appointed him governor of the province. The whole of Syria follows, him and with his deposition the Syrians will have a handle to question your election, and will rise like one man against you. When you are firmly seated, then, you can drag him out as you would draw a hair from a cake of dough! Mark my words, Moghaira's counsel to you yesterday, advising the retention of these governors was a piece of good advice, and his proposal today is a piece of treacherous villainy."

To such a seasoned advice Ali retorted, "A wordly wise man, actuated from motives of policy, might retain

these governors, but I cannot. I will not allow any of these governors to hold office for a single day, nay, for a single hour. If they obey me, well and good, otherwise they shall have no fortune but the sword from me. People rebelled against Uthman's government because of the violence and tyrannical exactions of his governors and their agents, and since the duty of imparting justice devolves upon me, any retention of such governors would be tergiversation and negligence in the performance of my rightful duty. How on earth can I allow those governors to remain in office, when they have misused their powers?" Ibn Abbas still attempted to make Ali see his point of view. "I know" he said, "You are brave as a lion but you are ignorant of the craft of statesmanship, and the wars that follow in the wake of any misjudgment. Don't you remember what the Holy Prophet said of war—that it is nothing but a game of deception?" "This is true", said Ali, "but I will have none of Mu'awiya". Ibn Abbas, with all the vehemence at his command, re-iterated, "Understand well that should you take such a step you will fall into an abyss of difficulties and hardships. The whole of Arabia will rise against you. The provincial governors will defy your authority and, under pretext of calling forth vengeance for the murder of Uthman, will fight tooth and nail against you. Sovereign powers demand that we should not let loose the reins of circumspection and diplomacy." Ali, who could not fall in with Ibn Abbas's hopes and beliefs, at long last said, "I herewith appoint you as governor of Syria." But Ibn Abbas declined the offer, pointing out with justice, "Should I go to take charge of Syria, Mu'awiya will either behead me or imprison me, because of my relationship with you. Being a cousin of the Caliph Uthman, Mu'awiya will find it all the easier to pretend that he is wreaking vengeance on Uthman's murderers. Try to make terms with Mu'awiya, before it is too late." Upon this, the conference broke up.

**Appointment of the New Governors**

Contrary to the advice of all his well-wishers, Ali dismissed every one of the old governors, replacing them by men he felt to be loyal to the Medina party. He appointed Uthman ibn Hanif to govern Basra, in place of Ibn' Amir; he appointed his cousin, Abdullah ibn Abbas to govern the Yemen (Arabia Felix) he appointed Qais ibn Sa'd bin Ubaydah to govern Egypt; he appointed Ummara ibn Shahab at Kufa, to replace Abu Musa, he appointed 'Sahl ibn Hanif to replace Mu'awiya, in Syria. Then, by an inexplicable and extraordinarily impolitic stroke Ali went on to support some of his own followers, thereby creating still more implacable foes whose rebellions were to keep him busy for the whole of his reign.

The historian Dozy<sup>1</sup> sums up the general policy as follows:—

“Raised to the Caliphate by the Defenders (Of the Caliph Uthman), Ali now dismissed all Uthman's governors and replaced them by Muslims of the old school, for the most part also Defenders. The Orthodox party were victorious, and they proceeded to establish themselves in power, to crush the tribal nobility and the Umayyads—those converts of yesterday who aimed at being the Pontiffs and doctors of the morrow.”

From the first, however, the policy met with only limited success. When Ali's new nominees went to take up their appointments the warmth of their reception varied greatly from province to province. Uthman's governor of Basra, Ibn Amir, handed over to Ali's newly-appointed deputy without any show of resistance and Qais ibn Sa'd was similarly able to instal himself peaceably as governor of Egypt; Ali's cousin Ibn-al-Abbas took over the government of Yemen without opposition, but only after his predecessor Yala ib Umayya had escaped to Mecca with all the money tha

1. Reinhart Dozy—*Spanish Islam*. p. 32 Publishers. Chatto & Windus London Edition, 1913.

the royal treasury of Yemen possessed. In Syria, however, and in Kufa, it was a very different story.

When Sahl ibn Hanif got as far as Tabuk, he found a squad of Syrians waiting for him. On hearing that he was the newly-appointed governor they said, "If you were appointed by Uthman, then well and good, but if you are the nominee of some one else, then it would be better that you should return to your master. We do not acknowledge Ali's authority and have sworn vengeance upon him for the murder of Uthman." Sahl was thus compelled to return to Medina. Similarly the new governor of Kufa was turned away by a show of force, and he also returned to Medina. The loss of prestige which the flight of both these governors epitomised, greatly perturbed Ali. Forthwith he started negotiations with Abu Musa at Kufa and Mu'awiyah at Damascus. Abu Musa temporised while Mu'awiyah's reaction to a request from Ali that he should take the oath of allegiance was an insolent silence. Far from being willing to submit to Ali he now plotted unceasingly to sow discord amongst Ali's followers and to bring about his downfall."

### **Mu'awiyah Accuses Ali of Favouritism**

With skill and eloquence, Mu'awiyah planned a campaign of propaganda against Ali, accusing him of favouritism, of appointing as governors in the provinces only those men who were either related to him or who belonged to the Medinite clique." Wherein" said Mu'awiyah, "lies the difference between Uthman and Ali. Ali has not appointed new governors to suppress the agitation set afoot against Uthman but has built a bulwark of his favourite officers to strengthen himself with a ring of friends."

Already the fears expressed, first by Moghaira and then by Ibn Abbas, were becoming reality. Ali has made his first serious diplomatic blunder. More were to follow.

**The defection of Talha and Zubair**

Two of Ali's followers who had been disappointed in their hopes, were Talha and Zubair. Both had sworn allegiance to Ali only after a public show of reluctance. Nevertheless they now asked Ali for the governorships of Basra and Kufa respectively, assuring him of their unswerving loyalty should they be confirmed in these appointments. But they found their ambitions thwarted by Ali who refused to grant their applications saying that, if such persons of note and merit were allowed to leave Medina, Ali would have none left of equal ability with whom he could confidently consult. Talha and Zubair pointed out that these provinces were near Medina and that they would therefore be at Ali's beck and call; also that should an emergency arise, they could speedily come to Ali's aid with reinforcements. Ali would have none of it. "Do you know on what condition we have sworn allegiance to you?" they persisted. "You swore fealty to me", replied Ali, "on the condition that you would obey me as you have obeyed Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman." "Not so, my Lord," was the answer, "we swore allegiance to you on the condition that you would make us partners in the administrative affairs of the State". Ali, who would suffer no one to dictate terms to him, ordered them to be silent and, greatly cast down in spirits, the two warriors left his presence.

It was not in Ali's nature to compromise with people he did not trust, but by refusing to make terms with Talha and Zubair, Ali alienated the sympathies of the two men who might well have become his most powerful allies. Realising that Ali had no mind to give them any say in his administration, Talha and Zubair now cast round for an excuse to leave Medina for Mecca, asking for permission to go on the pilgrimage. This Ali also refused to grant them and they finally left in secret.

If the Sunni writers are to be believed, the original intention of Talha and Zubair in journeying to Mec

was to raise forces to free Medina from the rebels; who still held the capital in their power and whom Ali was powerless to defy. The Sunni writers say that when Talha and Zubair had asked Ali to take vengeance on the regicides he had refused, saying that he was quite unable to take action against such a powerful enemy. They therefore went to Mecca to raise the necessary troops to free the metropolis.

According to Ibn Qutayba their motives in leaving Medina were purely personal ones and the express result of Ali's refusal to grant them the governorships they had asked for. They were both men of ambition and influence and if Ali would not allow them to support him, then they would plot his overthrow. Realising that they had no hope of mustering followers in Medina, they went to Mecca to join with Aishah and the enemies of Ali in the hope of securing the Caliphate for themselves.

In Mecca they could command considerable support. Talha, who had been one of the esteemed companions of the Holy Prophet, was also a blood relation of Abu Bakr. He was immensely rich and wielded enormous influence among the Meccan Quraish. Similarly Zubair, who had married Abu Bakr's daughter and whose mother, Sufiyyah, was an aunt of the Holy Prophet, (being the daughter of Abd-al-Muttalib) was also a man of great wealth, popularity and influence. Thus by alienating the sympathies of these two men, Ali further increased the hostility of the Meccan Quraish towards him.

### **Mu'awiya's letter to Zubair**

Mu'awiya had lost no time in sowing discord amongst Ali's followers. Knowing that Talha and Zubair had been disappointed in their hopes for the Caliphate, the wily Umayyad is reputed to have sent the following letter to Zubair:—

“In the name of God, the most Beneficent and

Merciful. From Mu'awiya bin Abu Sufyan to the Commander of the Faithful Abdullah az-Zubair. Salutations. I have taken for you the oath of allegiance in your name from the people of Syria. They have gladly accepted you as their Lord. You should similarly contact the people of Kufa and Basra and win them over to your side. If the people of both these provinces submit to your authority, I am sure you will be safe in the saddle without any one to oppose you. The next after you, for whom I have taken the oath of fealty is Talha. It behoves you now to press Ali and demand satisfaction for Uthman's murder. Both of you ought to take action at once in this matter. May God help you in your designs, and frustrate the hopes of your enemy."

The authenticity of this letter is highly questionable. It is unlikely that a person as shrewd and astute as Mu'awiya and one, moreover who laid claims to the Caliphate himself—would have been so rash as to write a letter which could be used against him after his accession. On the other hand there can be little doubt that Mu'awiya did everything in his power to encourage Talha and Zubair to recant their oath of allegiance to Ali and that the promise of his active support served to revive in them their hopes of the Caliphate for themselves. Meanwhile Mu'awiya's own ambitions were steadily increasing with the growth of his power.

### **Syria Clamours for Vengeance**

It was to Damascus that the Umayyad chiefs had fled immediately after Uthman's murder, bearing with them the bloodstained shirt as evidence of his murder. Sir William Muir<sup>1</sup> describes the way in which Mu'awiya immediately made use of these relics as propaganda:—

"Mu'awiya had no sooner received the emblems of

1. Sir William Muir—*The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline and Fall*, p. 237-38. publishers, John Grant. Edinburgh. Edition 1924.

Uthman's murder, —the gory shirt and Na'ila's mangled fingers,—then he hung them on the pulpit of Damascus Mosque. There suspended, they remained a spectacle maddening the Syrians to bloody revenge. Still, he took no immediate action. Biding his time, he waited to see what the new Caliph might do. Had Ali been wise, he would have used the angry Syrians to take vengeance on the regicides, and in so doing crush as well the rising rebellions of the Arab tribes. In this work they would have been his strongest help, for Syria never suffered from the Bedouine turbulence which kept al-Iraq and Egypt in continual turmoil. It had been the early favourite field of Quraish who, settling there more largely than elsewhere, found their influence, in consequence, all the better recognised. Moreover, they inhabited the Syrian cities common with the Christian population, which had surrendered for the most part on favourable terms. Syria was, thus, throughout all classes orderly and loyal; whereas al-Basra and al-Kufa were filled with restless and headstrong Arab tribes which held the conquered lands to be their own especial patrimony. Law prevailed in Syria; in al-Iraq and Egypt, petulance and pride of arms. Syria was, moreover, attached to the Umayyad stock, and so remained faithful to the end."

In addition to these Umayyad chiefs who had found asylum in Damascus, many other malcontents made their way to Syria to gather around Mu'awiya. Damascus, like Mecca, soon became a rendezvous for those who were dissatisfied with Ali. The sedition, say the chroniclers, spread like a huge fire, fanned by the sight of the emblems of Uthman's death, which were daily on view in the mosque. Rumours were rife that Ali had not only failed to bring Uthman's murderer to justice but that Ali himself had been an accomplice in the murder, or at least he had abetted the murderers by harbouring and protecting them. Professor Hitti

1. Professor P.K. Hitti—History of the Arabs. p. 180 Publishers Messers Macmillan & Co. Edition 1949.

describes the skill and eloquence with which Mu'awiya conducted his campaign of propaganda.

"Mu'awiya, now came out as the avenger of the martyred Caliph. With the tactics and eloquence of an Antony, he endeavoured to play on Muslim emotions. Withholding his homage from Ali, Mu'awiya tried to corner him with this dilemma: Produce the assassins of the duly appointed successor of the Prophet, or accept the position of an accomplice, who is thereby disqualified from the Caliphate. This issue, however, was more than a personal one: it transcended individual and even family affairs. The real question was whether al-Kufa (the metropolis of Ali) or Damascus, al-Iraq or Syria should be supreme in Islamic affairs."

The whole of Syria now clamoured for vengeance and Mu'awiya judged that the time had come when he might safely and openly defy Ali.

### **Mu'awiya's Defiant Despatch**

After having detained Ali's first messenger a full three months, Mu'awiya now finally deigned to send an answer. It was impertinent and laconic. The cover of the note, properly superscribed with the address, "From Mu'awiya to Ali," bore the state seal. The paper inside was blank. Mu'awiya's messenger, Kabisa, a Bedouine chief of note, who carried the envelope on his staff, roamed about the capital, attracting a mob of citizens anxious to know its contents. Kabisa was then ushered into the presence of Ali, who tore open the envelope. Finding nothing inside, in great rage the Caliph asked him, "What does it mean?". Kabisa then asked, "Is my life safe?". Being told that it was safe, and that he was at full liberty to speak, the messenger said, "Know ye then, there are no less than 60,000 Syrians whose beards are wet with tears, who, rallying around Uthman's bloody shirt which they have made a standard in the mosque, have armed themselves, and are bent on revenging Uthman's murder." "What",

answered Ali, "How on earth can they hold me responsible for it? Dost thou not see that I am helpless to punish the regicides?" Then calling God to witness, Ali said, "O Lord! Thou knowest well. I am not guilty of it. It is as yet beyond my powers to take the assassins to task." Then a voice from amongst the mob was heard, saying, "Kill the dog of this Syrian of a messenger for his impudence". At this Kabisa took to heels and retorted, "Four thousand chosen warriors are near at hand. See to your camels and steeds." "Silence" said Ali, "Begone! See thy life is safe." As the envoy left, the mob reiterated the cries of "slay the Syrian dog, Down with that villain of a Syrian messenger."

### **Ali Warns the Medinites**

Realising that war with Syria was inevitable, Ali delivered the following sermon<sup>1</sup> to the Medinites, warning them of the dangers that threatened and urging them to unite before it was too late:—

"Beware! Satan has gathered his forces. His army is multiplying. Due to this (The Satanic forces at work) tyranny and lies attract people to them. They blame me, without rhyme or reason. They have not done justice to me. They demand from me the right which they themselves have abandoned; they demand from me blood for blood which they themselves have shed. If in their insinuations they say that I had participated in the murder how could they be acquitted. But if they murdered him without my permission, it is they who are guilty. Their (repeated) demand for taking vengeance upon the murderers (of Uthman) is demanding milk from a woman who has dried up. Once again they want to revive the innovations of Uthman which are done away with. O thou persons! who suffered losses and now invite me to war, come before me. I am under all circumstances satisfied with the teachings of the Qur'an and the Holy Prophet. If they refuse to

1. Nahj-al-Balagha. Sermon No. 26.

abide by the orders of the Qur'an and the Holy Prophet, the sword which helps the upholders of truth and destroys those of falsehood shall settle the matter. It is surprising that they invite me to war. May God curse them! War can never frighten me into submission. I am not afraid of death. I have absolutely no doubt of Islam."

### **Ali Prepares for War against Mu'awiya**

Thus resolved to make the sword the arbiter between Mu'awiya and himself, Ali proclaimed an expedition to Syria. Levies were ordered. Despatches were sent to Basra, Kufa and Egypt to send reinforcements and whatever succour they could. Having completed these preparations, he declared a Jihad against Mu'awiya, and exhorted the men of Medina to join the ranks of Islam. "Now or never", said Ali, "If you fail to fight, you will lose power and these accursed schismatics will destroy the solidarity of Islam. Perhaps the Lord will set right that which the nations are setting wrong." This appeal fell on deaf ears, and the people did not respond to the Caliph's call. The ranks of Ali were very thin indeed.

Again he called the people together, ascended the pulpit and harangued the Faithful in the following sermon,<sup>1</sup> known to history as "The Blessings of Jihad".

"Jihad is one of the doors of heaven. God opens it for his friends and saints. It is the dress of piety. It is a useful and beneficial armour (in which the Faithful should be clad). It is a strong shield (for the Believers in Faith). If a man gives it up, God will make him wear the robes of disgrace and shame. He will get the wrapper of misfortune. Verily, he shall be dishonoured and shall never get justice and fair play.

Beware! I urge you to fight day and night, openly and secretly, against this community (the followers of Mu'awiya). I tell you to attack them before they attack

1. Nahj-al-Balagha. Sermon No. 31.

us. By God! The people who had fought in their homes (in self-defence) have been disgraced. You are shifting your responsibilities to others, and this will result in your ruin and destruction. Your houses will be occupied. Behold! this brother (Mu'awiya) is entering Amber with his cavalry. He has killed Hasan bin Hasan Bakri, the governor of that place. He has displaced your cavalry from its arsenal. I am told that one of his soldiers entered the house of a non-Muslim woman and took away all her ornaments and jewels. She could not repulse him but cried for help. His army returned with huge booty. None of them was wounded nor was any drop of their blood shed. Now if any dies of grief<sup>1</sup> by hearing this tragic news, he cannot be blamed. His death will rather be a blessing. It is both wonderful and heart-rending that though they (Mu'awiya's followers) are misguided and mistaken, yet they are united: and though you are the upholders of a true cause, you are disunited and divided. May you become the target of arrows! They kill you and you cannot destroy them. They fight against you and you evade fighting. God's commandments are being defied, and sins are committed (in open day light), and you see these things passively as submissive on-lookers. When I order you to march in the summer season, you request me to delay the departure till the hot season is over; when I order you to march in the winter season, you complain of excessive cold and want me to postpone the march till the cold season is over. These are lame excuses. If you are afraid of the excessive heat or cold you will run away at the sight of the sword. O men! although none of you deserves to be called a man! O dreaming children! O Foolish human beings! How I wish I could not see you or recognise you.

1. Such was the sanctity of the observance of the treaties and contracts whether entered with a Muslim or non-Muslim, that any breach of any of their clauses was not only considered scandalous but tantamount to the death of the rulers. According to the Arab code of nobility, a person who failed to fulfil a contract was said to have suffered the death of sacrificing his honour—an act worse than physical death.

By God, I am ashamed at the sight of you. May God destroy you. You have broken my heart. You have made me lose my temper. You have always made me drink the draught of sorrow. You have upset all my plans, through your sins and disobedience. The Quraish now say that the son of Abu Talib is undoubtedly brave, but ignorant of the art of war. May God bless them! Is there any one from amongst their ranks who was more steadfast than I was in war? Why, I have been fighting in wars since I was barely twenty years old, and now I am sixty. But suggestions and plans are of little value to men who do not act upon them."

### **The Rebellion of Talha and Zubair**

In this sermon, one hears, once again, the ring of authority in Ali's voice. How irksome it must have been for one of his temperament to have endured for so long the insolence of Mu'awiya and the jibs of the Meccan Quraish, to have brooked the defection of Talha and Zubair without, resort to arms, to have persisted in negotiations and attempts at compromise when his whole nature must have cried out for action. Now at last his duty to Islam is clear, his head is high, his voice defiant, he stands forth in the pulpit as a true leader of men. Unfortunately the call to action came too late. The enemies of Ali had spread such uncertainty among the people that they remained frozen to his appeals, not knowing which cause was the rightful one, that of Ali or that of the avengers of Uthman.

At this point, while endeavouring to raise an army against the distant enemy in Syria, Ali received the news of danger nearer home. Talha and Zubair were in open rebellion. The first civil war was about to begin.

## CHAPTER X

# THE FIRST CIVIL WAR

### **The Mustering of Ali's forces**

The people of Medina did not know which way to turn, whether to support Ali or the cause of Uthman. Not sure on whose side lay the right they were reluctant to take up arms against Mu'awiya in Syria and even more perturbed at fighting against Talha and Zubair, who had been the trusted friends of the Holy Prophet and loyal followers of the three previous Orthodox Caliphs. They had known and respected Ali as the "Great Lion" but his repeated, and uncharacteristic attempts at conciliation seemed to argue guilt and complicity in Uthman's murder. There were very few who were willing to become involved in a civil war for a cause they held to be doubtful. Abbey<sup>1</sup> de Marigney describing Ali's difficulties in raising troops to fight against Syria goes on to point out the still greater danger threatening Ali from nearer home:—

"But while Ali was endeavouring to guard against a distant enemy, (Mu'awiya), a party was formed even in Arabia which was so much the more formidable because the famous Aishah, the Caliph's (Ali's) inveterate enemy, was at the head of it. She was the mainspring, and as it were, the soul of that conspiracy against Ali, and at her house the conspirators assembled to debate on such measures as were proper to be taken for securing the

1. Abbe de Marginy—History of the Arabians under the Caliphs. Vol. II. p. 16 and 23. Publishers T. Payne, D. Wilson and T. Durham. London. Edition 1758.

success of their plot. And there appeared, either personally or by deputies, the whole house of Umayya, who concurred in the design of revenging the death of Uthman, who was one of their family."

Ali had always looked upon the Medinites as his main prop and stay but he was powerless to move them in the face of the propaganda of his enemies. Abbe de Marigny<sup>1</sup> says:—

"Though Ali was well beloved of the people, though they well knew that he was fairly elected, and though he was allowed to be the best orator of the age, yet his harangue was far from having the desired effect. Instead of loud acclamations and the readiness which he expected his friends would have shown to take up arms without delay, and which was so necessary in order to prevent the spreading of a revolt, he had the mortification of finding a universal silence and backwardness amongst them, the fear of a civil war seeming to have tied up their tongues, as well as frozen their zeal for his cause."

"Ziyad ibn Hantela, a person of eminent rank and distinguished valour was so moved at the indifference shown by his countrymen, that he voluntarily stepped up to Ali and said, "Let whosoever hold back, we will be forward."

Anxious above all to show the Medinites that he had not been a party to Uthman's murder, Ali next referred the matter to the religious Doctors of Law who, after due deliberation delivered the following judgment:—

"The Imam (Caliph) Uthman, the master of Two Testimonies<sup>2</sup> did not die by the hand of the master (Ali) of two Testamonies."

This pronouncement established the innocence of Ali in the eyes of the Medinites who now felt more

Abbe de Marginy—History of the Arabians under the Caliphs. Vol. II, p. 16 and 28. Publishers T. Payne, D. Wilson and T. Durham, London. Edition 1750.

2. The master of Two Testamonies denoted, the Commander of the Faithful, who as the head of the religion testified the two cardinal dogmas of Islam (1) There is none but one God and (2) Muhammad (may peace be upon him) is his Apostle.

willing to defend him. When the judgment was delivered, Abu Khotada, a prominent Ansar, drew his sword, saying, "The Holy Prophet, upon whom be peace, girt me with this sword which has lain sheathed for a long time, but now it is the proper moment to un-sheath it against these hypocrites who have led the believers in faith astray." At this the people promised unanimously to defend Ali but he was still unable to muster more than nine hundred men.

Realising the pitiful inadequacy of his forces and being anxious, above all, to avoid shedding Muslim blood, he made one last attempt at conciliation, writing a personal appeal to Talha and Zubair to obey him for the sake of Islam.

### **Ali's Letter of Conciliation to Talha and Zubair**

Writing to the two great warriors Ali said,

"Verily both of you know very well, although you pretend to be in ignorance of it, that I did not take a step towards the people, but on the contrary they took a step towards me. I did not ask them to swear allegiance to me, but they themselves came to me. I conceded to their request. Both of you also stepped towards me and took the oath of fealty. People did not either swear allegiance to me through any dread of fear, not from hope of any worldly gain or profit. So if you took the oath voluntarily, how can you retrace and recant? If you swore under compulsion, even then you have proved the case against yourself, because you outwardly preferred obedience to me, and concealed your (inward) treachery from me. By God! such hypocrisy never fitted Muhajirs of your calibre. There was a good deal of scope left for you before you took the oath, but as soon as you took it, no margin was left to you for recanting that holy contract into which you entered of your own free will.

You say that I am the murderer of Uthman. Come forward and let those people of Medina who did not

(BOOK SECTION)  
 Dattil Sajjad, opp. Midway Park  
 Soldier Bazar, Karachi

take sides with either of us judge between you and me. Their judgement will reveal what we each did at that occasion. O experienced old men! Repent of what you did. It is bad enough that you have incurred the odium of the people of this world, but consider that in the life to come, you will face hell (for your abode), as well as bearing disgrace on earth."

The letter had no effect whatsoever on the course of the rebellion, which continued as Aishah had planned it.

### **Aishah's part in the Rebellion**

It is necessary to digress for a moment and to consider the part played by Aishah in fomenting the rebellion.

Aishah had long hated Ali. Strained relations are said to have existed between them even while the Holy Prophet was alive. In 633 A.D. when the Holy Prophet was returning with her from an expedition, some mischief-mongers maliciously spread slanderous gossip about her, but God vindicated her honour in Chapter XXIV, verse II of the Qur'an. Ali, however, she thought, had doubted her virtue and from that day she had harboured a grudge against him. Moreover, Ali's wife Fatima, was the step daughter of Aishah, and there seems to have been no love lost between the step-mother and the step-daughter either. Aishah also wished that, when the aged Uthman died, her own kinsman, Zubair, should become Caliph. When Uthman was assassinated she was not in Medina, having gone to Mecca a few weeks previously to perform the pilgrimage. The news of the Caliph's murder reached her when she was on the way back. She returned immediately to Mecca and addressed the citizens thus:—

O ye people! The rebels of different provinces have murdered the innocent Uthman. These people framed some charges against the Caliph at the outset, and when they could not prove them, they rebelled against him.

What had been ordained as unlawful by God was made lawful by the regicides. They broke the sanctity of the city of the Holy Prophet, in the sacred month of Haj. They plundered and looted the citizens. By God! A single finger of Uthman was more precious than all the possessions of the regicides. The mischief has not been crushed. It befits you now to seek satisfaction on these murderers. It is vengeance alone that can vindicate Islam's honour."

This fiery address set a match to the smouldering fire of discontent. The first to respond to Aishah's call was Abdullah ibn Amur, the Uthmanid governor of Mecca. Those Umayyads who had fled from Medina after the ghastly murder of Uthman now also joined Aishah. Walid ibn Uqaba, Yala bin Umayya, the ex-governor of Yemen, and a host of other malcontents, were only too ready to make common cause against Ali, and when Talha and Zubair came over to Aishah, many more of the dissatisfied Quraish clamoured to join in the rebellion.

Aishah, advocated a march on Medina, arguing that it was best "to uproot the malady root and branch". Some of her followers proposed that they should march to Syria and join with Mu'awiya, others that they should attack Kufa. The proposals were much debated and deliberated. Many feared to invade Medina, believing the Medinites to be solidly behind Ali; others distrusted the character of Mu'awiya who had the reputation of being treacherous. Finally, seeing that no conclusion seemed likely to be reached, Talha proposed a march on Basra: "For urged he, "most of its inhabitants will make common cause with us because Ibn Amir, the ex-governor of Basra (now deposed by Ali) was a good friend and staunch supporter of Uthman and even now commands a good deal of influence in Basra and the neighbourhood."

At long last, it was upon Basra that the rebels decided to march.

**Aishah Collects an army to March on Basra**

Throwing off the veil ordained on her sex Aishah now took command of the army. The money to equip it came from the Yemen treasury, brought to Mecca by the governor whom Ali had deposed. To raise the men proved no difficulty. Proclamations were made in the city of Mecca, to the beat of drums, and circular letters were carried by envoys into the surrounding countryside. Always the theme was "Vengeance", "Vengeance for the murder of Uthman." The emotions of the people were inflamed to the fever pitch:—

"The Mother of the Faithful", the messages ran, "together with Talha and Zubair, is leading an army to Basra and whosoever has any spark of faith left in him let him come and join the ranks to defend the religion and fight to avenge Uthman's martyrdom. If he has not the means for the journey, he will be provided with conveyance, arms, accoutrements and other necessary equipment." This appeal met with a ready response from the servile masses, who joined the ranks in large numbers. Assembling these troops, the Mother of the Faithful urged them to fight to the last against Ali and the Medinites. Talha and Zubair exhorted them to show feats of heroic gallantry in the impending holy war, for, as they both said, "We have left Medina and its people in a quandary. Right has been mixed up with wrong in such a way that the people know not which way to turn. Let Mecca rise up and teach a lesson to the traitors who have slain the innocent Caliph."

To stir them up still further, Aishah quoted the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:—

"And if two parties of the believers quarrel, make peace between them; but if one of them acts wrongly towards the other, fight that which acts wrongfully until it returns to Allah's command: then if it returns, make peace between

them with justice and act equitably; for Allah loves those who act equitably."

(The Qura'n 49: 9)

Then, with all the emphasis at her command, she urged the Muslims to avenge Uthman's murder, for, said she, "Yesterday they have killed Uthman, and tomorrow they may lay hands on any one they like. Are they not taxing the faith of the believers by letting the assassins go scot-free, and encouraging the mischief mongers by a policy of vacillation? Some three thousand volunteers joined the ranks of the Meccans, of whom one hundred were note worthy citizens and warriors who had made a name in the previous wars. Aishah, mounting on a camel, took command of the army, and the cavalcade set off. The other widows of the Holy Prophet accompanied Aishah part of the way, one of them, Hafsa, the daughter of the late Caliph Umar the Great, was persuaded only with great difficulty from following Aishah for the whole of the expedition. As the women parted, they wept bitterly, for the uncertainty of fortune that lay in store, and so our chroniclers call it "The Day of Tears."

### **Desertion Amongst Aishah's Followers**

The cavalcade had marched only a few stages before the confederates began to quarrel, the point at issue being who, in the event of victory, would be the Caliph, Talha or Zubair. Some of them felt that the decision should be left to the people of Medina, a project which was quite detestable to the majority. Aishah tried in vain to silence the arguments by declaring them premature but doubt had begun its insidious damage. Soon rumours were circulating that Talha and Zubair were using the garb of religion to cloak their personal motives of ambition and self-aggrandisement. Like the people of Medina, the confederates now began to find the issue most perplexing. As the first heat of their

emotions subsided and cooler reason took over, they began to say, "We do not know on which side lies the right. On the one side is the Mother of the Faithful, and on the other side is the Commander of the Faithful. It is better to retire until such time as things are shown in their right and true perspective."

The first to desert was Sa'eed, the ex-governor of Kufa, who turned back to Mecca. Hearing the confederate battle-cry of "On to Busra, to exterminate the godless Killers of Uthman," he retorted, "Why go so far? The objects of your vengeance (Talha and Zubair) are riding on their camels before you. Kill them and return home." This was indeed dangerous talk and calculated to spread unease throughout the whole of Aishah's forces. The next person to be overcome with doubts about the possible outcome of their mission was to be none other than Aishah herself.

### **Aishah at Hau'ab**

As Aishah's forces came up to the watering-place near the village of Hau'ab, the dogs of the village came out and barked at her. This reminded her of a saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) who one day, while sitting amidst his wives, said, "Oh I know which of you is the one at whom the dogs of Hau'ab will bark. She will be in a critical state, with an imminent danger facing her." Greatly alarmed, she asked the name of the place, and on being told it was Hau'ab, muttered in terror, "It is I, it is I, that wretched woman about whom the Apostle of God made the prediction. I will not take another step forward in this unlucky expedition." She then repeated the verse of the Qur'an:—

"And God is the unseen in the heavens and earth, and to Him is returned the whole of the affair; therefore serve Him and rely on Him, and thy Lord is not heedless of what you do."

(The Qur'an II:123)

Dismounting from her camel she insisted on staying the night at the village. Greatly alarmed by her change of heart, and fully realising the damage it must do to their cause, Talha and Zubair made some peasants swear on oath that the village was not, and never had been called Hau'ab. Still Aishah could not overcome her fears. Not a foot would she move.

Talha and Zubair are said to have hit upon another ruse. They instructed their cavalry to ride some distance ahead and then to return at full gallop, shouting "Quick! Quick! Here comes Ali and his troops." This brought the desired result. Aishah, apprehensive of the danger, immediately ordered her troops to break camp with all haste and, swiftly, ousting her camel, was soon leading her army on the road to Basra. The lies told by the followers of Talha and Zubair are said by the historians to have been the first public lies since the establishment of Islam.

### **Aishah Negotiates with the Governor of Basra**

As Aishah's army came within sight of the city, Uthman ibn Hanif, the Alid Governor of Basra, sent two men to ask the Mother of the Faithful the cause of her arrival thither with an army. Aishah replied, "I swear by Almighty God, that a woman of my rank and position can never hide the truth; and no mother can conceal anything from her sons. The bare fact are before you, that the rebels from the various tribes invaded Medina, violated its sanctity, and caused mischief. These rebels had given refuge to the regicides. They stand guilty of condemnation before God and His Apostle. Besides this, they shed the blood of the innocent Caliph. Whatever money was unlawful for them was captured by them as booty. They transgressed upon the holiness of the household of the Holy Prophet, disgraced the sanctity of the holy month of Haj, pillaged the house of the Faithful, ravished the Muslim women, and forcefully broke into those houses into which

they had no right to enter. The pious Muslims have not the power to free themselves from their tyranny, and are not safe from their depredations. I have come out to tell the Muslims what irreparable harm is being done to those who are at the mercy of the rebels, on whom they commit innumerable offences. God says,

"It does no good to chastise them. But (it is advantageous indeed) to give charity, or to introduce reform amongst the believers."

We stand here for reformation, which has been ordained by God and His Apostle to be enforced on every Muslim man and woman. This is our objective, in the pious attainment of which we are inviting your help; and we are here to restore better relations between the believers in faith—a duty incumbent on every man and woman."

Aishah's address, calculated to appear as though she had no other desire but to bring the murders of Uthman to book, won over a good many of the Busraites to her side. In reality, however, she was under the slogan "Vengeance for Uthman", delivering a deadly attack on Ali's authority. Uthman ibn Hanif, the Alid Governor of Basra, realised this only too well and, although anxious to avoid civil war, he decided to hold his forces in readiness to defend the city.

### **Uthman ibn Hanif Rallies the Busraites**

Addressing the Busarites, Uthman ibn Hanif told them of his decision to oppose any attempt by Aishah to occupy the city, with the full force of arms.

"O ye people! You have sworn allegiance to God, Whose hand is over your ~~hands~~. Whosoever will recant his allegiance will himself be the sufferer but whosoever will fulfil his undertakings will be recompensed by God. I swear by God that had there been a worthier candidate than Ali for the Caliphate, he would not have accepted the burden of this charge. Had the people sworn

allegiance to any one else except Ali, the later would have also sworn allegiance to him. Ali would have obeyed that Caliph blindly. Remember that Ali had no ill will against any of the companions of the Holy Prophet. Both Talha and Zubair took the oath of fealty to Ali, but their aim in taking such an oath was not to obey God. Instead of seeking recompense from God they seek recompense from men. Now both of these assert that they took the oath under compulsion, when the sword was placed on their necks. We have to see what the opinion of the masses is. Where there is the majority, there lies the torch of guidance. It is an open secret that the majority has elected Ali as Caliph. Is there any further doubt, then, where the truth lies?"

After Uthman ibn Hanif's address, his deputy governor, Hakim ibn Jabala ascended the pulpit and told the people that should the confederates of Mecca enter the city, they would be opposed with all the might of their arms. He went on to add that should all the people leave him, he would nevertheless fight all alone against the Meccans, and that he would jump over all the hurdles that came in the way of truth and right. Those who fell while fighting them (the Meccans) would earn the crown of martyrdom.

In spite of these impassioned pleas, Ibn Hanif was able to muster only one thousand men who were willing to make common cause with Ali and who would swear never to allow the Meccan army to enter their city unopposed. For the most part the Busraitcs were as uncertain as the Medinites had been about which side was in the right and they were anxious to remain uncommitted in the struggle to come.

### **Uthman ibn Hanif opens Hostilities against Aishah**

Uthman ibn Hanif led his thousand men out of the city walls and encamped on the left of Murbid. Aishah's

army lay to the right of Murbid. Before the general battle was joined, representatives of each of the opposing forces followed the usual Arab custom of declaiming the righteousness of their cause and the valour of their warriors. After Talha and Zubair had each said their say, Aishah herself addressed the Busraites, trying to establish the innocence of the Caliph Uthman and the guilt of the men who had rebelled against him. Her speech proved effective. Not only did it win over some of the moderates to her side but it also started a good deal of argument and disagreement amongst the ranks of Ibn Hanif's small army, tempers running so high that the men began throwing stones at one another.

In retaliation, one of the tribesmen of the Banu Sa'd, who had joined with the Busarites, began to taunt Talha and Zubair. "You were the chosen disciples of the Holy Prophet," he said, "and you defended him by risking your lives in all the wars that he fought. I see that the Mother of the Faithful is with you. Have you also brought your own womenfolk with you? Both answered in the negative. Thereupon, he said, "It is deplorable indeed that you protected your women in your homes by leaving them behind, while you brought your mother, Aishah, on the battlefield to confront the swords and spears of the warring party. You did not show any respect or consideration to her. Is this just?"

Another of the Arabs addressing himself directly to Aishah said, "O Mother of the Faithful! The murder of Uthman was a thing of lesser significance than your uncalled-for arrival here on this camel. God gave you the veil for protection, but you have rent it to pieces. What a shame and a slur on the Holy Prophet's memory to forego the sanctity of the veil, and to abandon female or woman's propriety! The self-same persons who witness your war-mongering endeavour will also be a witness of your (moral and physical) death. If you have come here of your own free will, return back to your

house; and if you have been brought here by force under compulsion, then ask for help and you will find enough Muslims here to conduct you to your home with honour and safety." Another asked Talha and Zubair, "Was not Ali duly elected, and yet here you are, recanting that very oath with which you bound yourself in chains of loyalty to that duly elected Caliph?"

By this time excitement amongst both armies had reached fever pitch and general hostilities commenced with an attack led by Ibn Hanif's deputy, Hakim ibn Jabala. The Busraitcs rained volleys of arrows on the Meccans, who nevertheless managed to check their advance. The battle continued until nightfall; the armies separating at sunset until dawn of the following day. Hakim, carried away by his loyalty to Ali, hurled curses and abuse on Aishah; while Aishah, already sickened by the shedding of Muslim blood, began vainly to try and stop the fighting. When night fell at the end of the second day both armies had suffered losses, the heaviest being on Ibn Hanif's side.

### **The Temporary Truce**

On the evening of the second day envoys were exchanged at sunset and Aishah made overtures of peace. Uthman Ibn Hanif accepted her terms and a truce was declared.

The exact terms of the truce are shrouded in mystery. Some chroniclers say that it was agreed to send envoys from both sides to Medina, there to enquire into the causes of the present rebellion. Should it be established that an oath of allegiance had been extracted from Talha and Zubair under compulsion or coercion, Uthman ibn Hanif, the then governor of Busra, was to hand over the city peacefully to the confederates of Mecca. If this were not proved, then the Meccans would leave the city gladly, and return to Mecca. The story of this compromise is probably a myth.

**The Compromise a Myth**

According to the Shi'ite chroniclers the chief envoy of the Busraitcs is said to have been Kab bin Sur, the Qazi of Busra. On reaching Medina, he is alleged to have gone straight to the Mosque where the people had already assembled for the Friday prayers. There he is said to have demanded in a loud voice, the answer to the whole vexed question of the loyalty of Talha and Zubair: "O ye people of Medina!" his words ran, "I have been appointed as arbiter and ambassador by the Busarites, and have come to ask you whether Talha and Zubair took the oath under compulsion, or voluntarily, without any dread or fear." At once Usama bin Zaid stood up and said, "Both these gentlemen were made to take the oath under threat and force." At this hot words passed between Usama and Sahl ibn Hanif (brother of Uthman ibn Hanif, the Alid governor of Busra) and they would have come to blows, had not the people intervened. Then Sohaib bin Sunan, Abu bin Zaid, and Muhammad bin Busalama, rose up in support of Usama's views, creating chaos and confusion among the listening congregation. Once again the Medinites began to be divided amongst themselves, faction against faction, camp against camp and tribe against tribe.

To the impartial observer it seems highly unlikely that the envoys ever went to Medina at all. More probably the whole story of the compromise was fabricated by the Shi'ites to strengthen their case. It appears incomprehensible that the envoys from Busra could have entered Medina without Ali's knowledge, that they could have entered the Mosque (straightway after their arrival), which was thronged with Ali's supporters, and have dared to address the congregation on such an inflammatory issue, without let or hindrance of any kind. Even more unlikely is it that they could have left Medina without Ali's having been informed of what had happened. In the face of such improbable details it is hard

to draw any other inference than that the story is a myth, originating in the unbalanced religious fervour of the partisans.

On the other hand historical facts seem to suggest that Ali was not in Medina at the time when the envoys are supposed to have gone there, but on the Medina-Busra road, encamped at ar-Rabaza.

### **Ali at ar-Rabaza**

With only nine hundred men willing to fight on his side, Ali had been obliged to abandon the Syrian campaign against Mu'awiya, deciding instead, after his conciliatory letter to Talha and Zubair had failed, to use his small force against Aishah's rebellion. Hearing that she was marching on Basra he set out along the Busra road. Realising, however, that his army was by no means adequate for the task in hand, he made camp at ar-Rabaza, there to collect re-inforcements. For this he sent envoys to the outlying tribes, of which the first to declare in his favour were the Banu Tay and the Banu Asad.

Saeed ibn Ubeid, the chief of the Banu Tay, approached Ali and said "O Commander of the Faithful! There are some who do not speak openly what is in their heart, but such is not the case with me. I have always held you in the greatest esteem. I have looked upon you as the Imam (Spiritual guide) both openly and secretly, and have resolved to fight against your enemies wherever I meet them. I consider you a person of the highest merit, more worthy than any one of this or any other age to be called a superman. Stretch forth thy hand." Then clasping the Caliph's hand in his, he swore the oath of allegiance to him. Then followed the men of Banu Tay. The men of Banu Asad, too, paid allegiance to Ali, but many other tribes held themselves aloof from his cause, wishing to see how events would turn out.

From ar-Rabaza Ali also wrote letters to the pro-

vincial governors asking for men and money. In particular he hoped that the Kufans might come to his aid. Meanwhile all he could do was to wait. As far as can be determined he was in ar-Rabaza when the news of Hanif's truce with Aisha reached him. Certainly the news displeased him for he wrote the following<sup>1</sup> letter to Hanif:—

"Calling God to witness, I say that the rebels swore allegiance and then broke it. The devil has instigated them to follow a path which is not acceptable to God. These people are not afraid of God's wrath. When they return to you, persuade them to stick to that path of fidelity which they have deserted (at Medina). If they submit, behave kindly towards them. Should they persist in their treachery, fight with them until God decides between us.

I am writing this letter from my camp at ar-Rabaza and am coming toward you with all speed."

If Umar Abu Nasr,<sup>2</sup> author of *Khulfa-i-Muhammad*, is to be credited, Ali is said to have despatched a subsequent note to Uthman ibn Hanif to the following effect:—

Talha and Zubair have sworn allegiance to me under no compulsion. Even if they did do it under fear or compulsion, such a constraint was used on them for preserving solidarity of Islam and not for creating discord amongst the believers. If they recant from what they have sworn, and they are aiming at enforcing my abdication, they are without any excuse. If there is any other grievance besides their aspiration to the Caliphate, I am willing to consider it."

This second note, if it can be considered authentic, would support the view that Ali had heard that envoys had indeed been sent from Busra to Medina to determine whether or not Talha and Zubair had been co-

1. *Nahjal Balagha*. Vol II. page 239. Publishers Messers Ghulam Ali & Sons, Lahore.

2. Umar Abu Nasr-Khulfa-i-Muhammad. Urdu translation, by Sheikh Muhammad Panipati. Publishers Idara-i-Faroug Urdu, Lahore. p. 46 (Chapter on Ali).

erced into swearing allegiance.

### **Ali Hopes for Peace**

While at ar-Rabaza Ali persisted in his attempts to avert civil war. One of his sermons at that time bears witness to the peaceable nature of his intentions.

"Praised be Lord, Who has bestowed on us a religion whereby those tribes who fought internecine tribal wars were united. Peace prevailed in the land until this ruler (Caliph Uthman) fell by the hands of those whom the devil had led, astray; and they raised rebellion in the land. However, it was but natural that friction should creep up amongst the believers, as it had crept before in other nations, and we must invoke God's help in averting the calamity." Then turning to his son, Hasan, he said, "Whatsoever is, exists of necessity. And remember a time will come when the people shall be divided into seventy three sects, the worst of which will be those that shall set me at naught and will desist in following my example. You have known it and seen it; wherefore stick to your religion and be directed in the right way, for it is what your holy Prophet has ordained. Leave alone what is too hard for you, till you test it with the Qur'an, and stand by what the Qur'an approveth, and reject what it disapproveth. Delight in God (for being your Lord), in Islam (for being your religion), in Muhammad (for being your Prophet), and in the Qur'an (for being your guide)."

Shortly after this Ali was to hear that Busra had been occupied by Aishah and her confederates, but even as he marched out of his encampment to go to the relief of that city, he still hoped to be able to work out a policy of what is today termed as "peaceful co-existence". When asked by an Arab chief, Ibn Rafaa, what his intentions were Ali replied:—

"What I will have and what I intend is peace; if they (the rebels) will accept it. Failing this we will leave them alone to their pig-headed rashness. We

will do whatever is just on our part, and bear privations with patience". "But" said Ibn Rafaa, "what will happen if it does not satisfy them?" "Then" said, Ali, "we will leave them alone so long as they let us alone. If not, as a last resort we must defend ourselves."

### **The Sunnite View of the Rebellion**

At this point, with temporary truce declared at Busra between Aishah and Uthman ibn Hanif, it will be profitable to examine the Sunnite views of the rebellion, which are co-incident with those held by Aishah herself. For the Sunni authors the rebellion of Aishah, Talha and Zubair was prompted by the noblest of motives. In support of this view they bring forward four main arguments:

(1) That these big three did not take up arms until full four months had elapsed since Ali had assumed sovereign powers—ample time for him to have taken the regicides to task, had he genuinely wished to do so.

(2) That no ill will existed between Aishah and Ali, the alleged abettor of her slanders. If Aishah's magnanimous nature could forgive the chief ring-leaders in that piece of mischief-making, such as Hassan and Mistah, surely she could have forgiven Ali with equal readiness. The subsequent conduct of Aishah towards Ali, after the unfortunate incident, had always been affectionate and praiseworthy, and not a single instance could be quoted to prove otherwise.

(3) That the rebellion of these three was not aimed against Ali, but against the miscreants of Basra who had been the ring-leaders in Uthman's execution. In taking up arms against the rebels Aishah well knew that amongst them was her own real brother, Muhammad bin Abu Bakr but her sense of justice was so keen that she preferred to penalise him rather than disgrace the law by not enforcing it. That these three were firmly convinced of the majesty of law, and, once confirmed in their belief, they never shrank from laying down their

lives. That if any error was committed by them, it was that of judgement, in so far as that, instead of leaving the matter to the Caliph, the supreme authority in the Islamic Commonwealth, they took the law into their own hands and marched on to Basra to exterminate the rebels.

(4) That these three were the three great personalities of Islam—persons of great integrity, who had no ulterior motives of self-aggrandisement, as can be deduced from the fact that at the time of Umar's death, the names of Talha and Zubair were included amongst those six who were to appoint his successor. So scrupulous and selfless were Talha and Zubair that they withdrew from the candidature of the Caliphate in favour of Uthman. Again, after the assassination of Uthman, both these magnates swore allegiance to Ali and declined to accept the office for themselves. From the very first day of Ali's accession, both insisted that he should wreak vengeance on the murderers, and it was only when they were disappointed over his refusal to do this that they themselves took to arms to destroy the culprits.

It would be futile to enter into a detailed discussion of the validity of the arguments put forward, all of which are coloured by a spirit of partisanship but one thing which emerges as indisputable is the existence of bad blood between Ali and Talha and Zubair. Wherever Talha and Zubair went, they depicted Ali and his aims in the most lurid colours, and similarly Ali looked with the deepest suspicion upon all their activities.

### **Aishah's Forces Attack Basra**

Whether the right was on Ali's side or on Aishah's, and whether or not the envoys ever went to Medina, one thing is certain, the uneasy truce between Aishah and Ibn Hanif finally came to an end, with Aishah demanding that the Alid governor of Busra admit the justice of the cause of Talha and Zubair and insisting

that he yield up the city to her forces. With Ali's letter fresh to hand, Ibn Hanif did not feel that he could justifiably comply with her request, whereupon Talha and Zubair resolved to seize Busra by force. The occupation of Busra was vital to their future plans as they needed the city as a base for further military operations.

Under cover of a dark and tempestuous night their forces surprised the city's defences and succeeded in occupying the Mosque. Ibn Hanif performed prodigious feats of valour in his attempts to dodge the assailants, but in vain. His house was surrounded, he was taken prisoner and then subjected to the most outrageous treatment by the Meccans, who plucked out all the hairs of his beard and eyebrows by the roots. According to some reports he was also given forty stripes before being thrown into prison.

Uthman Ibn Hanif's arrest did not make the Meccans masters of the city. His staunch deputy, Hakim Ibn Jabala, carried on the struggle with what small forces he could muster. Ibn Jabala, who had been the ring-leader of the regicides when Caliph Uthman was murdered, well knew what fate would be in store for him should he fall into the hands of the Meccan confederates. His companion Ammar, also attempted to continue the defence of Busra before fleeing the city but the Busarites themselves, never too sure as to which side to support, were seized with panic and badly defeated. In their frenzy the Meccans massacred every one of the enemy forces in cold blood; they also dragged from their homes any one who might be remotely suspected of having been connected with the murder of the Old Caliph Uthman.

### **The Occupation of Busra, October 17th, 656 A.D.**

On October the 17th, 656 A.D. Busra was occupied by the confederates who at once set about making speeches and demanding that the Busraitcs declare themselves unanimously against the Caliph Ali. Talha

and Zubair and Aishah also proclaimed publicly, and to the beat of drums, that if anyone suspected of complicity in the murder of Caliph Uthman still remained alive, he must be delivered up for execution. This order was carried out ruthlessly and in the subsequent "purge several hundred, very many of whom were certainly innocent, were slain. Those who remained alive in Busra swore allegiance to Talha and Zubair conjointly. Talha proclaimed war on Ali and asked the people to join in what he called a Holy War.

News of Aishah's success at Busra spread to Medina, Yemen, Syria, and Kufa. Her messengers waged unceasing propaganda against Ali and it was her hope that these people would rise up against Ali to avenge the death of Uthman.

### **Ali Receives Uthman Ibn Hanif at Dhulkhan**

With the fall of Busra, Ali realised that he could not delay committing his small army for much longer. Accordingly he marched as far as Dulkhan on the Medina-Busra road. Here he was met by Uthman Ibn Hanif who had either been set at liberty by the Meccans, or had escaped from jail. According to some authorities he had been deliberately set at liberty in order to show Ali the treatment to be expected by anyone rash enough to remain loyal to his cause. In any event, Ibn Hanif was in a sorry state when he confronted his Caliph, half dead from the treatment he had received at the hands of the Meccans and with his beard plucked out. "O Commander of the Faithful," he said, "You sent me to Busra with a beard, but now I return to you disgraced without one." "The privations you have suffered", said Ali "are meritorious. People were well satisfied with the role and administration of law of my two predecessors (Abu Bakr and Umar). They meekly submitted to the third one (Caliph Uthman). At long last they selected me, and Talha and Zubair swore allegiance to me, but did not stick to their words. What

amazes me is the voluntary submission of the nation to Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, and their unwarranted opposition to me. By God, they will soon know that I am in no way inferior to any of my predecessors."

Ibn Hanif's companion, Ammar also escaped from Busra and is said to have joined Ali.

### **Ali's Army at the time of the Occupation of Busra**

Ali spoke bravely and confidently to Uthman Ibn Hanif but his confidence was hardly justified when one considers the state of his army. The people of Medina continued to keep him supplied with money, arms, horses and camels and he had had some small successes with winning over the local tribes to his side. Nevertheless he was still hopelessly outnumbered by the confederates and, unless substantial re-inforcements were forthcoming, he would still be unable to move into an attack. All his hopes were now centred on Kufa, a neighbouring city of Busra whose Governor Abu Musa Ashari had sworn allegiance to Ali at the beginning of his Caliphate but who appeared, with the success of Aishah's rebellion, to be veering away from Ali's cause like a weather cock. In order to try and win active support from the Kufans, Ali had sent envoys from ar-Rabaza, choosing Muhammad bin Jaffar and Muhammad the son of Abu Bakr for this vitally important mission; he now eagerly awaited the outcome of their negotiations.

## CHAPTER XI

## (THE FIRST CIVIL WAR Continued)

## THE BATTLE OF THE CAMEL

**Ali Attempts to Establish a Kufan Alliance**

When Ali heard that Aishah was marching on Busra, his thoughts turned at once to its near neighbour, the city of Kufa. Like Busra, Kufa was a new township that had but lately been settled by the Bedouine tribes mostly from the Yemen. It was a busy, thriving community, intensely proud of its prosperity and its rapid development. If the confederates envisaged making Busra the centre of their activities, perhaps, Ali reasoned, the Kufans might consider the advantages of becoming the rival capital. To this end Ali instructed his envoys Muhammad Ibn Jaffar and Muhammad son of Abu Bakr in the following words:—

“Should they (the people of Kufa) respond to my call, tell them, how I prefer them to all other subjects of the Commonwealth. Give them the tidings that I intend to make Kufa the capital of my Empire. Treat the Kufans with kindness, and ask them to come and arbitrate between us and those that have separated from us. Point out to them that I am putting my trust in them at this critical juncture. Let them come forward to help the religion of God, and adopt such measures as may help to reconcile the divided Muslims, and make them brethren once again.”

**The Cold Reception of the Envoys**

In spite of these assurance from Ali, Abu Musa,

the governor of Kufa, received the envoys coldly. Made cautious by the success of Aishah at Busra, he had decided, in spite of his sworn allegiance to Ali when he had become Caliph, to follow a policy of strict neutrality. When the envoys delivered Ali's letter to him, he remained silent, nor did he follow the usual custom of taking these ambassadors to the mosque, there to read the letters they carried in the presence of the congregation so that every one present might have the chance to give his opinion on them. On the evening after Abu Musa had first seen the envoys, his reply, when some one asked him if he was willing to go out (i.e. to join Ali), was, "Today my opinion is not what it was yesterday. What we hated yesterday has drawn upon us what we see now. There are only two alternatives—going out (to join Ali) or sitting at home (to watch the turn of events). The latter is an ideal way while the former is a way of mischief, from which every one ought to refrain." None sitting nearby uttered a word, their silence approving what the governor had said, in spite of the sorrowful reproaches of the envoys whom Ali had sent.

Turning towards these outraged ambassadors, Abu Musa then continued "the inauguration of the Caliph places you and your master (Ali) in an awkward position. Therefore we have decided not to engage ourselves in the struggle, unless sheer necessity compels us to do so. Let it be understood that we shall not take sides until you have rid yourselves of the murderers of the Caliph Uthman. Now both of you may return to Ali and inform him of our decision."

Ali's reaction to this reply was to send two further ambassadors, the great magnates Ashtar and Ibn Abbas, in the hope that two such respected figures might succeed where the previous envoys had failed. They, too, were received coldly by Abu Musa, who made the following speech in response to their request:

"The companions of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) knew more of God and His Apostle than those

who have not had the opportunity of meeting him. Certainly you have a right over us. My humble advice to all of you that you should not assume the air of having God's authority with you, and should not make war on God. Let your followers who have come from Medina go back to their homes till they all agree on an unanimous verdict, and they know best who is to be relied upon. The present rebellion can be appropriately epitomised in the famous sentence of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, who predicted of the approaching time when "he that sleepeth in it is better than he that sitteth; and he that sitteth is better than he that standeth; and he that standeth is better than he that walketh on foot; and he that walketh on foot is better than he that rideth." Therefore I will give you this advice. Sheath your swords, take off the head of your lances, cut your bow-strings and take the injured into your houses, till a solution is found to the present crisis, and disturbances cease."

### **Ali sends his son Hasan to Kufa**

When Ashtar and Ibn Abbas returned unsuccessful to Ali's camp, Ali decided to make still one more bid for the support of the Kufans. This time he chose for ambassador no less a person than his own son Hasan, believing that the grandson of the Holy Prophet must surely endear himself to the Believers in Faith. By the time Hasan reached Kufa the city had become a hot-bed of intrigue. Spurred on by propaganda from Aishah, some of the Bedouin tribes had declared against Ali, while others wavered between the two causes. Abu Musa was anxious not to stir up open disagreement and, although he received Hasan with great respect, he did everything he could to deter him from going to the Mosque to address the Kufans publicly. Hasan, however, was determined to deliver Ali's message to the people of Kufa and nothing could turn him from his resolve.

Accompanied by Ammar, who had so manfully defended the Alid cause at Busra, Hasan made his way to the Mosque, followed by an increasing number of Kufans. As soon as he entered the Mosque there was a loud burst of applause, for Hasan was personally much beloved by the Believers. Those Bedouine who were inclined towards Aishah and her cause, were however unwilling to be convinced of the justice of Ali's arguments and the applause rapidly gave way to tumult. Two letters from Aishah were produced, in which she had instructed the Kufans either to observe strict neutrality or to go over to her side and join her army.

After carefully studying the contents of these letters Hasan put a question to the Kufans, "Did not God enjoin upon Aishah," he asked, "the duty of living quietly in her house, and leaving it to the men to fight on the battlefield until the sedition was quelled? What an irony of fate", he continued, that she should command us to do her part and has taken upon herself to do our part".

This criticism of Aishah's conduct incensed the opposing faction, who would not tolerate any censure of the Mother of the Faithful. A heated debate ensued but Hasan, calling upon the people to be calm, addressed them as follows:—

"Your Caliph" said he "needs your assistance. It is both in your interest and a duty incumbent upon you to help him. Can you give any reason for refusing him help? Is there any one who can reasonably accuse him of having shown any covetous inclinations, or withholding or perverting justice? Can anyone amongst you say that he thrust himself into the Caliphate, or that he proved himself unworthy of this dignity in any way? Beware of those rebels who pretend to have taken up arms to avenge the murder of Caliph Uthman. O ye people of Kufa! the avenging of Uthman is only a pretext to dethrone the Caliph, (Ali) and it is this which is their real aim. Ali was unanimously elected at Medina, and 'Talha and Zubair, who now lead the rebels, took

the oath of allegiance to him. They were the first to support my father, and now are the first to forswear him. Therefore come and do what is good, and forbid what is evil."

This moving address had the desired effect. The heads of the various tribes declared that, since they had sworn allegiance to Ali, who had made several overtures to them through various envoys, it was high time for them to comply with the commands of their Caliph. The magnetic personality of Hasan, his attractive and pleasing manner and his great personal popularity had succeeded, at long last, where all other envoys had failed. The hearts of the Kufans were won over and they responded most handsomely to his call for the enlistment of volunteers.

Hasan told them that he was going to join his father and that he would consider it a great honour to march at the head of any men who cared to volunteer. Soon a force of ten thousand strong left Kufa to swell the army of Ali.

Some historians say that Ammar did not accompany Hasan on the mission to Kufa but that he was sent there together with Ashtar, shortly after Hasan's departure with instructions to take the citadel by force of arms. While Hasan was busily negotiating with the Kufans in the Mosque, Ashtar, these historians allege, stormed the fortress of Abu Musa, taking it completely by surprise. He then sent the defeated garrison to tell the governor what had happened in his absence. By the time the defeated soldiers arrived at the Mosque, the audience had been so much moved in Hasan's favour that, far from going to Abu Musa's aid they would willingly have sacked Abu Musa's castle had Hasan not intervened to prevent them.

### **Ali Receives the Kufan Volunteers Warmly**

Ali was overjoyed by the news that ten thousand Kufan volunteers were on the way and full of praise for

their zeal and faith he came out to meet them and expressed his gratitude as follows:—

“Brave warriors of Kufa! You were always distinguished by your prowess and valour. It was you who overran Persia. Your ethical sense and judiciousness always led you to help the weaker and the right. I have repeatedly invited you to decide between us and our brethren of Busra. My intention is to use gentle means, in the sincere hope of bringing them to our side without shedding one drop of Muslim blood. If any one of you correspond with friends there, or has any influence in the place, I request him to leave no stone unturned in bringing about a peaceful settlement. I declare here openly that I prefer peace to all the advantages that may accrue to me from the force of arms, because I know fully well that on whichever side the victory falls, desolation invariably accompanies it.”

### **The Strength of Ali's Army**

At long last Ali was in a position to march on Busra. At his camp on the Medina-Busra road he had by this time collected a force of ten thousand<sup>1</sup> auxiliaries which was now further swelled by the 10,000 volunteers from Kufa. Nor was the city of Busra entirely hostile to Ali and, as he advanced towards it, a number of the Busarites deserted to him. Busra had been in Confederate hands a full month. When Ali's army went into camp outside the city walls although Aishah's army outnumbered the loyalists, the name of Ali still inspired fear in his adversaries and they knew well they had no general of his calibre and standing.

### **Ali a Man of Peace**

Ali was a seasoned commander, born and bred in

1. \* The number of Ali's troops varies. Some say his force consisted of 20 Strong, and some say that it was 30,000, while others give the number as We are certain that the Meccan force had the numerical superiority and as reliance can be placed on the figure of 20,000.

wars and famous for his skill as tactician. His ascetic life had not chilled his martial fervour and at the advanced age of sixty he still retained the vigour of a much younger man. There now seemed nothing standing between him and a successful campaign but, so devout had he become and so anxious to avoid the shedding of Muslim blood by Muslims, that his thoughts still turned towards peace. Of his desire and pacific intention, Sir William Muir<sup>1</sup> writes :—

“But Ali's thoughts were for peace if possible. He was a man of compromise and here he was ready, in the interest of Islam, magnanimously to forget the insult offered him. Apart, indeed, from the personal jealousies there was no disagreement sufficient to bar the hope of reconciliation. The cry of Talha and Zubair was for vengeance against the murderers of Uthman and Ali did not deny that justice should be dealt. But he was obliged to temporise. He had in his army great numbers of the very men who had risen against Uthman, and he felt that to inflict punishment on them, as his adversaries required, would for the present be impossible. Holding these views, he halted, still some little way from Busra, and sent forward Al-Ka'ka (who with other leaders of renown had joined him from Kufa) to expostulate with Talha and Zubair. “Ye have slain 600 men of Busra” said al-Ka'ka to them, “for the blood of Uthman; and lo! to avenge their blood, 6,000 more have started up. Where is this internecine war to stop? It is peace and repose that Islam needeth now. Give that, and again the majesty of Law shall be set up, and the guilty brought to justice.” As he spoke the truth flashed on the minds of Talha and Zubair, and, even of Aishah; and they returned word that if these really were the sentiments of Ali, they were ready to submit. After several days spent in such negotiations Ali, glad at the prospect of a bloodless compromise advanced.”

1. Sir William Muir—*The Caliphate, its rise, decline and Fall*. p. 247. Publishers John Grant, London. Ed. 1924.

**Ali Treats Once More with Talha and Zubair**

Overjoyed at the prospect of an amicable settlement, Ali mounted a horse, and rode to the Meccan camp. Meeting Talha, the Caliph asked, "Why have you risen against me, after swearing allegiance to me?" "It is true" replied Talha, "We did take the oath, but at a time when the sword was on our necks, and now we demand justice against the murderers of Uthman." Ali retorted, "I hold these accursed regicides guilty as much as you do but in order to take them to task I must play for time." Then Ali asked Zubair, "Do not you remember what transpired between the Holy Prophet and ourselves, when the former asked you, "Do not leave my dear son-in-law (in the lurch) and you said, "Yes" to which the Apostle of God said, "Notwithstanding this, a day will come when you shall rise up against him and will be instrumental in causing great miseries to him and all the believers in faith". Zubair was greatly moved at Ali's reproach, knowing that he had indeed broken that promise of friendship which he had sworn in the presence of the Holy Prophet. Meekly he answered, "I well remember that occasion. Had I recollected it before, I would never have taken arms against you." Zubair then repeated his oath not to oppose Ali in future, and thinking that negotiations for a truce had proceeded satisfactorily, both armies went to rest that night in peace.

**The Nature of Ali's Army**

Ali's attempts to secure a bloodless compromise were, however, to be foiled by the regicides among his own army. As Ali himself had pointed out to Zubair the major portion of Ali's army had been recruited from the Bedouin volunteers of Kufa, men who had an active part in the rebellion against the Caliph Uthman and whom, as he explained to Talha and Zubair, it was impossible for him to punish. What Ali had

done, was to give orders that none of the suspected regicides should accompany his advance force to Busra. They were to remain behind his army, taking no active part.

To these regicides the prospect of peace could only be alarming. It was in their interest that a civil war should be fought in which all that element which demanded vengeance on Uthman's murderers might be destroyed. At a secret meeting they decided to remain in the van of Ali's army, ready to precipitate war if need be.

This indeed they did, attacking Aishah's camp while it was still dark and making all further negotiations impossible.

### **Failure of the Negotiations**

The Shi'ite chroniclers attribute the outbreak of hostilities to a different cause, saying that Aishah, greatly shocked by Zubair's change of heart now incited him to renew his opposition. "If you are preturbed", she is alleged to have said, "because you swore an oath to Ali at the time of his election, you can expiate it by setting a slave at liberty." According to another source it was not Aishah but Zubair's son Abdullah who persuaded Zubair to rejoin the Meccans.

Aishah, according to Abbe de Marigny,<sup>1</sup> was unwilling to abandon her cause under any circumstances. All the conferences (for peace) that had passed were fruitless. In vain did the Caliph, who had reason and justice, as well as numerous army on his side, take measures to bring about a reconciliation. The turbulent Aishah would not listen to his terms, and defeated all his measures in so much that they were at last forced to a decisive action."

1. Abbe de Marigny—*The History of the Arabian Caliphs* Vol. II p. 37  
Publishers, T. Payne, D. Wilson & T. Durham. Ed 1758.

### **The Battle of the Camel or Khuraiba, the 10th Jamad-al-Thani 35 A.H. (December 4th, 656 A.D.)**

The two armies were encamped in the Wadi-us-Saba or 'Valley of the Lion' near the village of Khuraiba outside Busra, facing each other. When the regicides from Ali's army fell upon the confederate camp great confusion arose. Neither side knew which of them had played false and attempts by both Ali and Aishah to stop fighting failed. Aishah, on the advice of some of her followers, went so far as to mount her camel and ride up and down the ranks, urging the men to cease battle. Some chroniclers say that it is in commemoration of this effort of hers to stop fighting that the battle is called "Jamal" or "Camel".

Behind Aishah, rode a warrior holding the Qur'an aloft, but he was killed by an enemy arrow, falling to the ground with the Holy Book. Meanwhile the fighting amongst the ranks grew ever fiercer. It was a terrible thing to see Muslims cutting the throats of their brother Muslims and the Arab world once again split into factions. Sir William Muir<sup>1</sup> writing about the battle, points out the strange nature of the engagement:—

"It was a strange engagement—the first in which Muslims had crossed swords with Muslims. It resembled a battle of the old Arab times, only that, for tribal rivalry, were now substituted other passions. Clans were broken up, and it became in some measure a contest between the two rival cities. The Ban ar-Rabi'a of Kufa fought against the Banuu ar-Rabi'a of Busra, the Banu Modar of the one against the Banu Modar of the other, and so on, with the various tribes, and even with families, on one part arrayed against the other. The Kufan ranks were urged on by the regicides who felt that, unless they conquered, they were all doomed men. The fierceness and obstinacy of the battle can be only

1. Sir William Muir—*The Caliphate, its Rise Decline and Fall* p. 248  
Publishers, John Grant, Edinburgh. Ed. 1924.

thus accounted for. One of the combatants tells us that "when the opposing sides came together breast to breast with a furious shock, the noise was like that of a washerman at the riverside."

### **Death of Talha and Zubair**

Sir William Muir then goes on to contrast the fury of Ali's troops with the half hearted attitude of the Meccan leaders. "The attitude of the leaders was in marked contrast with the bitter struggle of the ranks. Zubair, half hearted after his interview with Ali, left the battlefield according to his promise, but while on his way to Mecca, Zubair came across the detachment of one Hanif Ibn Qais, who had remained neutral in the course of war, and was watching the course of the battle, anxious to join forces at the eleventh hour with the conqueror. Hanif was more inclined towards Ali than towards any of the Meccan confederates and when he saw Zubair passing in front of him, ordered his men to chase him. One of Hanif's soldiers, Amr, followed Zubair, overtook him, and brought him before his master. They came face to face and began to converse with each other. Realising that the time of prayers had come, Zubair began to offer them. When he prostrated himself, Amr with one blow of his sword chopped his head off from his body. So, say the Sunnite writers, fell Zubair, attaining the death of a martyr—a man who could not give up prayers in his last hours.

Talha, meanwhile, disabled by an arrow in the leg, had been carried to safety in Busra. The house where he lay was one of the last to hold out against Ali's men but Talha was to live only a short while longer. Mortally wounded and feeling his end to be near, he sought to renew his allegiance to Ali, calling out to one of Ali's men, who was passing hideout, to approach him. Asking the man to come nearer, Talha then said, "Stretch forth your hands so as to enable mine to be put forth in yours and thus will I renew the oath of allegiance which I have

already taken to Ali." No sooner had he uttered these words than he gave up the ghost.

### **Carnage in the Battle of Camel**

Back on the main field of battle Aishah and Ali continued to plead with their troops to stop the carnage, but in vain. The dead and the dying lay piled in heaps and the appalling slaughter continued, until, bereft of the leadership of Talha and Zubair, the frenzy of the Meccan confederates began to abate, and they began to take stock of their position. The battle, they suddenly realised had reached a critical stage for them, also the Mother of the Faithful was in grave, personal danger. The Meccans, now much sobered, began to form a cordon around Aishah's camel. For the regicides of Ali's army this camel now became the main target. Showers of arrows were loosed at the beast which, Ali quickly saw, had now become the rallying point for the Meccan forces. Wherever the camel stood, there the battle was waged most fiercely and over seventy confederates are said to have lost their hands while holding its bridle. As long as that animal was standing, Ali realised, would the battle continue. He therefore deputed one of his men to cut off its legs. The warrior slipped behind the camel, did as he was bidden, and the poor beast thudded to the ground. Within a very short time the bugle sounded the end of battle. Ali, as always, having proved himself a master tactician.

Aishah escaped with her life, although the litter in which she had been sitting was so stuck with arrows and javelins that it looked like a hedgehog. It was lifted off the back of the dead beast and Aishah was borne to the safety of a nearby tent.

### **Ali's treatment of Aishah**

After the battle, Ali repaired to Aishah's camp where he treated her with the greatest deference, "F

said he, "respect must be shown to her because she is the spouse of the Holy Prophet in this life and in the life to come." Aishah, who had at this time, reached the age of forty five—an age which by the Arab standards of the day might be considered advanced, was still very vigorous. When Ali, in his greeting to her said, "May the Lord show mercy to thee, and forgive thee for what you have done. "She retorted without the slightest sign of repentence, "And to thee, also".

Aishah's brother Muhammad son of Abu Bakr, who had fought bravely for Ali also went to Aishah's camp to visit his sister and was overjoyed to discover that she had escaped without injury, though quick to point out to her how meaningless had been the conflict which she had done so much to provoke.

In the care of her brother, and under the command of his own two sons Ali then sent Aishah to Medina. She was shown every deference and given forty hand-maids. Ali himself accompanied her retinue on foot for a short distance, before bidding her farewell. "It befits your dignity", Ali said to her, "to remain in your house and not to meddle in politics or to share the rough life of the battlefield, nor to join any party in future which may tarnish the glory of your name, or become the authoress of a second rebellion." To this Aishah replied, "By God! there existed no enmity between Ali and me, save a few petty domestic squabbles." Ali replied, "Ye People! the Mother of the Faithful has spoken the truth. There existed no difference between her and me, except a few petty quarrels of the family."

On her return to Medina, Aishah led a life of seclusion, devoting most of her time to the compilation of "Sunna" (traditions of the Holy Prophet) and becoming one of the chief sources of the Traditions or Table Talk of Muhammad (may peace be upon him). She is said to have died in 678 A.D., at the age of sixty-six.

### **Ali Grieves for the Fallen**

With the capture of Aishah the battle soon came to a

close. Some of the Busarites had already gone over to Ali's side, under the leadership of Ibn Qais, who had intercepted Zubair. Those that remained, rapidly lost heart and fled. Ali ordered his men not to pursue the fleeing enemy and his forces soon left the field, completely victorious.

Just before sunset, Ali went out to inspect the battleground, which was piled high with some ten thousand corpses. Among the fallen were many outstanding heroes of Islam who had fought in the wars of the Holy Prophet. Then they had been companions-in-arms of Ali, fighting with him on the same side, the side of Islam. Deeply moved, Ali offered funeral prayers for all the slain before they were laid in their graves.

When Amr, who had killed Zubair, came to Ali and, in the expectation of a great reward, presented him with the head of the rebel leader, the sight of the gory head of the old warrior, who had been a faithful friend of the Holy Prophet was too much for Ali to bear. Unable to hold back his tears, he said to Amr, "Verily your lot is hell-fire". Amr greatly surprised at this unexpected turn of events replied with some heat, "You are an evil judge of men. If someone delivers you from your enemies, you pronounce the judgment of hell-fire on him; and if any one kills your followers he becomes the friend of the devil." Bitterly resenting what he felt to be a great injustice, Amr then drew his sword and, without uttering another word plunged it into his own breast. So passed away the murderer of Zubair without any remorse for what he had done.

### **Sir William Muir<sup>1</sup> on the Battle of the Camel**

Sir William Muir comments on the Battle of Camel as follows:—

"The carnage in the ill-starred Battle of the Camel (for so it came to be called) was very great. The field was covered with 10,000 bodies in equal proportion on

1. Sir William Muir—*The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline and Fall*. p. 250.

either side, and this, notwithstanding that the victory was not followed up. For Ali had given orders that no fugitive should be pursued, nor any wounded soldier slain, nor plunder siezed, nor the privacy of any house invaded. A great trench was dug, and into it the dead were lowered, friends and foes alike. Ali encamped for three days without the city, and himself performed the funeral service. It was a new experience to bury the dead, slain in battle not against the infidel but Believer fighting against Believer. Instead of cursing the memory of his enemies (too soon the fashion in these civil wars), Ali spoke hopefully of the future state of such as had entered the field, on whatever side, with an honest heart. When they brought him the sword of Zubair, he cursed the man who took his life; and, calling to mind the feats displayed by the brave man that wielded it in the early battles of Islam, he exclaimed:—

“Many a time hath this sword driven care and sorrow from the Prophet’s brow.” The Muslims might well mourn the memory both of Talha and Zubair, remembering how on the field of Uhud, the former had saved the life of the Holy Prophet at the peril of his own; and how often the latter had carried confusion into the ranks of the idolaters of Mecca.

### **Ali’s treatment of the people of Busra**

Ali was determined to show mercy to the people of Busra, and, when some of his followers said, “Since the people of Busra had taken up arms against the lawful Caliph the survivors ought to be distributed as slaves amongst the soldiers of the army”, Ali refused to accede to their request. “I cannot allow you”, said he “to make slaves of Muslims in “Dar-ul-Islam”. Whatever arms and equipment the Busarites brought on the battle-field to fight against us, can be treated as “Ghanima” (booty captured on the battlefield) but whatever lies in their homes belongs to them, and you are not entitled to any share in it.”

## **The Division of the Spoils**

The division of the spoils was marked by an unusual incident which shows how deeply touched Ali had been by the loyalty of his followers. When, overcome by the extent of the victory, a soldier said to him, "O Lord, I wish that my brother could have been present with me on this occasion, to witness the grand victory that Almighty has given you." "Does he bear any love towards me?" asked Ali. "Undoubtedly he does." was the answer. "Then" said Ali "You may take it to be as if he has also participated in the war, and was present amongst us. Not only he, but all those who are yet unborn, and are in their mother's womb, and by whose birth the faith will acquire a new strength may be taken to have joined on my side in this war." Ali then gave the soldier his brother's share as well as his own.

Ali's main purpose after the battle was to try and re-create in the Muslims the sense of solidarity that they had known in the days of early Islam. The anecdote quoted above is but one of many examples of his desire to emphasise to his followers that all Muslims were brothers and all equally entitled to share in their true Islamic heritage.

This principle was carried much further when, on entering the city of Busra, Ali distributed all the money in the treasury, not only to his own soldiers but also to some of those tribes who had been hostile to him. Of Ali's own troops, some twelve thousand had survived and to each of these he gave five hundred dirhems, telling them that they would receive a far greater reward after they had subdued Mu'awiya.

## **The Results of the Victory**

This victory enhanced the power and prestige of Ali and made him master of Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, Persia and Khurasan,—provinces which had sworn allegiance to him when he became Caliph but which, until now,

with the rise of seditious movements, had been wavering in their loyalty to him. The only enemy that remained unsubdued was Mu'awiya, in Syria. After such overwhelming success, Ali was not apprehensive of Mu'awiya, who was considered bound to submit in due course. But it was not to be so. Had Ali marched into Syria while his soldiers were still carried away by enthusiasm and fervour for his cause, it is almost certain that Mu'awiya would have been defeated. But Ali did not strike while the iron was hot. Those conciliatory qualities which made him so noble a Muslim ultimately became the cause of his ruination.

It should also be noted that Ali's victory at Busra was virtually the victory of the regicides—the Bedouine volunteers whether of Kufa or Busra, who formed the chief prop and stay of Ali's army. Henceforward Ali was a puppet in their hands. They were always ready to rebel on the smallest provocation. Worse still, many notable companions of the Holy Prophet, who had kept alive the ideals of Islam, had fallen in the Battle of Camel. Their loss was a great blow to the Empire and it weakened Ali, spiritually at least, in the struggle to come against Mu'awiya.

## CHAPTER XII

KUFA THE NEW CAPITAL:  
AFFAIRS IN EGYPT**Kufa the new Capital**

The Battle of the Camel had been won with the help of the Kufans and Ali now made Kufa the metropolis of his Caliphate. It is not difficult to find reasons for his decision. Ali had cause to be grateful to the Kufans for their loyalty, he had promised with them to make Kufa his capital if they helped him against Talha and Zubair; and it was essential that the Bedouine remained loyal to him if he were to fight Mu'awiya. The central geographical position of Kufa may also have influenced his decision, for Medina was too far away from the Bedouine settlements to exert much positive influence. Ali may well have felt that the restless and trouble-seeking Bedouine could be far more effectively controlled from a city of their own making.

On the face of it, the decision to move his headquarters seems to have been a reasonably practical one, but Ali was to lose more than he gained by the change. The religious idealism and sincerity of the Medinites was sadly lacking in the newly-chosen settlement of Ali's Bedouine friends, as was the scholastic outlook, the seasoned judgment and the venerable traditions of the Medinites. Those eminent companions of the Holy Prophet who still survived were no longer to have any religious or political influence, in Arabia and, with the change to the new Capital, the old sanctity of the Caliphate was gone.

**Medina's New Role**

In a world where Might was henceforward to determine Right the spiritual values of Medina, it might be thought, would find little place; but although, for several centuries, Medina was to suffer a total eclipse politically, its scholastic and spiritual importance was constantly to increase. The city became famous for its discussions of Muslim law and jurisprudence and for its preservation of the Traditions of the Holy Prophet, a branch of knowledge which was developing into a regularised science. To Medina were attracted all those Muslims who wished to renounce the world in favour of the life of the spirit, religious devotees who treasured every word that Muhammad (may peace be upon him) had spoken. Among these, Ibn Abbas and Ibn Masud became famous for the schools they established, at first for purposes of research and, later, for public instruction. This puritanical city now became the seat of Muslim theology and out of the burning zeal of the Medinites there evolved the culture which today is called Islamic and which was to spread from Medina to Baghdad, to Spain, to every part of Africa and to the rest of the world.

**Character of the New Colonial Towns**

Kufa, like its neighbouring city of Busra, was a new colonial town that had been founded by Bedouine from the Yemen. From the dawn of history the Yemenites appear to have had a highly-developed culture which can be favourably compared with that of China and Ancient Egypt; indeed they boasted that it was they who took their culture to Egypt and they claimed to be the fathers of Arabian culture. Nevertheless their civilisation was strictly tribal and their newly-built city of Kufa was divided into numerous lanes, each one specifically reserved for a different tribe. The science of genealogy was the most revered of studies and everything was directed at the preservation of tribal individuality, in

contra-distinction to the unity of the tribes that had hitherto been the aim of the Islamic communities.

Next to the science of genealogy was the art of calligraphy, an art in which the Kufans achieved such distinction that even to-day, in the Twentieth Century, it is in Kufan script that the Holy Qur'an is written.

Rhetoric and oratory were also much cultivated in Kufa and it was here, to a most appreciative audience, that Ali delivered his famous sermons, thus increasing the fame that the city already enjoyed in these arts.

Joseph Hell<sup>1</sup> comments as follows on the character of Kufa and Busra:—

“The character of these towns, which had sprung up in Babylonia out of military cantonments—the towns of Busra and Kufa—stands in sharp contrast to that of the old Arab commercial towns—so little effected by the changed circumstances.

Here in consequence of conquering campaigns, a new world had come into being. The contact between the Arabs and the gifted Persian population stirred the Arabs to their depths and transformed them, so to speak, into a new and special race of men. The rapid growth of these towns—about 50 A.H. each counted 150,000 to 200,000 inhabitants—and the stimulation of the Persians called forth a lively intellectual movement; and thus Busra and Kufa became the most intellectually animated centres of Islam. The intermediary position—geographically and intellectually—which they held between Medina and Damascus tended to promote egotism and to foster a spirit of independence. There no authority was immune from challenge—whereas every rebel was sure of a hearing. Just as they upheld freedom in politics, so also they upheld independence of thought in the domains of art and science. Here, earlier than elsewhere, attention was directed to the scientific study of the Arabic language. The contact between the Persian and Arabic on one hand, and the deviations between the

1. Joseph Hell—*The Arab Civilization*. p. 39. Publishers Muhammad Ashraf Lahore.

language of the Qur'an and the vernacular on the other, evoked the linguistic and philological activity."

### **Character of the Kufans**

The Kufans, stemming for the most part from the Bedouine of the desert were proud, fierce and by nature rebellious. Since they had taken a dominant part in the conquest of Persia, Iraq, Syria and Armenia they had considered themselves, in the earliest days of Islam, the pillar of strength in the Commonwealth. After the death of the Holy Prophet, however, they had quickly lapsed into apostasy but the stringent policy of Abu Bakr brought them back into the fold, albeit somewhat in disgrace. Caliph Umar was not disposed to trust them implicitly and although he was very willing to make use of them in the ranks of the Muslim army, both as infantry and cavalymen, he refused to grant them commissions as commanders and other posts of trust and responsibility. During the reign of Uthman, however, the Kufans managed to regain their former military importance, monopolising high army posts and coming to dominate military policy. They were a force to be reckoned with and Ali was obliged to give them his most careful consideration.

Nevertheless in spite of their independence, their liberalism, their pride and their intellectual vigour the Kufans became synonymous with perfidy and time-serving treachery. In breaking away from the conservative traditions they went too far in the opposite direction and it was small wonder that the Arabs of the Hijaz blood looked down on them. "The Bedouine element", says the Arab chronicler, "whether of Kufa or Busra, was the rabble of the Arabian edifice, which formed the population of the new commercial towns."

It must also be remembered that the population of Kufa and Busra was by no means exclusively Arab. It consisted of those subject races who had accepted Islam (including Greek, Persian, and Byzantine elements) and

of the new Arab settlers who had chosen the towns as their home because they were ideally situated for the carrying on of commercial enterprises. Thus the population was bred out of an intermingling of races and commerce rather than from any religious or ethnological consideration. The egotistical, nationalistic spirit which the people displayed was not so much democratic as self-seeking-aggrandisement and irresponsible tribal warfare flared up on the slightest provocation and the fickle conduct of the Kufans became so notorious that even now, in the Twentieth century, the proverb, "as treacherous as a Kufan" remains in current use.

### **The Discontent of the Kufans under Ali**

Hardly had Ali entered Kufa, when the Bedouine leader, Ashtar, in order to stir up discontent recalled how, immediately after his election, Ali had appointed his own relations to key posts just as the murdered Caliph Uthman had done. "Has not Ali, said Ashtar, "appointed his cousins, the sons of al-Abbas, as governors of the various provinces." In order to further fan the fire of misgivings, Ashtar in the usual ancient Arab fashion, continued to tell his tribesmen, "What have we gained, by joining Ali and fighting against Talha, Zubair and the Mother of the Faithful? What benefit has accrued to us in the shedding of Uthman's blood?"

Although Kufa had become Ali's capital, there is little doubt that the Bedouine would have preferred a more material reward for their services at the Battle of Camel. They had not been allowed to pillage the rival city of Busra, nor to enslave its inhabitants and their leaders had not been given important and lucrative posts in the provincial governments. Such was the Kufan discontent that, soon after Ali's arrival in Kufa, they ravaged the province of Seistan near the Persian frontier and took possession of it. The general whom Ali sent to suppress their revolt was killed by them and they remained unsubdued until Abdullah bin Abbas, the new

governor of Busra, defeated them in a pitched battle and took possession of Seistan. Although this victory placed Seistan once more under Ali's authority, the rebellion had been a blow to his prestige and the Kufan Bedouines were to remain a thorn in his side. They rebelled on the smallest pretext and constantly broke the peace and tranquility of the empire.

### **Ali's New Nominee in Egypt**

Let us now return to the affairs of Egypt which, during the Caliphate of Uthman, had been governed by his nominee, Ibn Abi Sarah, until rebellion, in the latter part of Uthman's reign, forced Ibn Abi Sarah to retire to Palestine. When Ali assumed sovereign powers he deposed Ibn Abi Sarah in favour of the famous Ansar chief, Qais bin Sa'd<sup>1</sup> bin Ubada. This seasoned warrior of Islam, proud of his lineage and sincerely devoted to the Hashimites, was famed for his wisdom and diplomacy, qualities which were to stand him in good stead during his governorship. To the surprise of everyone in Medina, Qais left for Egypt with a retinue consisting solely of seven companions of the Holy Prophet. As a sign of his authority he had a letter from Ali, dated Safar 36 A.H. but no soldiers accompanied him. "The Caliph" said he, has greater need of the army at this juncture, with Medina in a turmoil, than I."

Whether or not he would have preferred to have had soldiers with him, is not known, but on arrival in Egypt he appears to have had little difficulty in winning over the majority of Egyptians to Ali's side. Tackling the rebellious element, led by the Kinanite, Yazid ibn

1. According to Waqidi and Tabari, Qais was not the first Alid governor of Egypt but was successor to Muhammad ibn Abi Hudafa; who during the attack on the Caliph Uthman by the rebels at Medina, had driven out Uthman's governor Ibn Abi Sarah and taken possession of Egypt on Ali's behalf. In 656 A.D. Muhammad ibn Abi Hudafa was enticed by Mu'awiya to come to Arish on the borders of Palestine, where he was treacherously murdered. It was after the perfidious murder of Ibn Abi Hudafa that Ali appointed Qais bin Sa'd as the governor of Egypt. Ali is said never to have chosen a better officer than Qais, whose active loyal work successfully consolidated Ali's position.

Harith, with wisdom, tact and kindliness, Qais succeeded in persuading them to swear allegiance to Ali. Similarly he succeeded in concluding treaties of neutrality with rebel chiefs of other tribes. A similar alliance was made with Maslama bin Mukhelled, who had been a staunch champion of the cause of Uthman.

A great many of the Egyptians had been on the side of the Umayyads but, because of his superb diplomacy, Qais succeeded in bringing Egypt under Ali's authority without incurring the least dissatisfaction amongst the rebels. Qais himself became deservedly popular with the Egyptians.

### **Mu'awiya Stirs up Suspicion against Qais**

Because of Qais's wise policy, Mu'awiya was unable to make any headway amongst the Egyptians. Seeing that his propaganda had failed, the governor of Syria next decided to try and win over Qais himself and, after several abortive attempts, went so far as to promise Egypt to him in perpetuity and to promote all his kinsmen to high offices. Having once more failed to win him over, Mu'awiya tried other tactics, sending Qais a letter in which he admonished him for having backed the wrong man—one whose hands were still smeared with the blood of Uthman. This letter had no effect on Qais, who replied that there was no evidence to prove the complicity of Ali in the murder and that, in the absence of conclusive proof, his loyalty to Ali would remain unshakeable.

Mu'awiya, foiled in all these attempts to win Qais over to his side, decided that his only hope lay in stirring up friction between Qais and Ali. Contrary to all the facts, the crafty governor of Syria let it be known throughout Arabia that Egypt would shortly declare for him. Qais, his propaganda maintained, was now Mu'awiya's friend and ally and about to make common cause with him. To strengthen his assertion his agents pointed out that Qais had not suppressed the party of

the Egyptian rebels who had demanded retribution for the blood of Uthman; on the contrary, with the assistance of Qais, this rebel party had become increasingly powerful and the vacillating policy of Ali's chosen governor was daily strengthening Mu'awiya's position.

At first these insinuations against Qais were advanced with the greatest caution but Mu'awiya's agents increased their campaign of rumours until the alleged disloyalty of Qais had become an open secret. The fires of suspicion were further fanned by those who were jealous of his popularity and Ali began to entertain doubts about the loyalty of the best of all his officers. As a test case he instructed Qais to follow an aggressive policy against the malcontents, but Qais who did not see eye to eye with Ali on this matter pointed out how impolitic such a course of action would be, for it would certainly jeopardise the peace of Egypt. This was interpreted by Ali as conclusive proof of Qais's treachery. Qais was forthwith deposed and Muhammad bin Abu Bakr appointed in his place.

### **Qais and Ali are Re-united**

Qais obeyed the royal summons and gave over the charge of Egypt to Muhammad bin Abu Bakr. Greatly incensed at the treatment he had received from Ali, Qais decided to leave the political arena and retire to Medina. There too, he found himself surrounded by hostility and insults. Thus taunted, especially by Merwan bin Hakem, a cousin of Mu'awiya, he decided to go to Ali at Kufa and demand a fair hearing from the master he had served so loyally and faithfully. Ali received him with open arms and made him his chief adviser, news which caused Mu'awiya to chide his loquacious cousin, Merwan, in a letter which ran, "A fool thou art indeed. Had you given a hundred thousand men to Ali, it had been a lesser evil to me than to give the counsel of such a man as Qais to my enemy." Nevertheless Mu'awiya was overjoyed that Qais was no

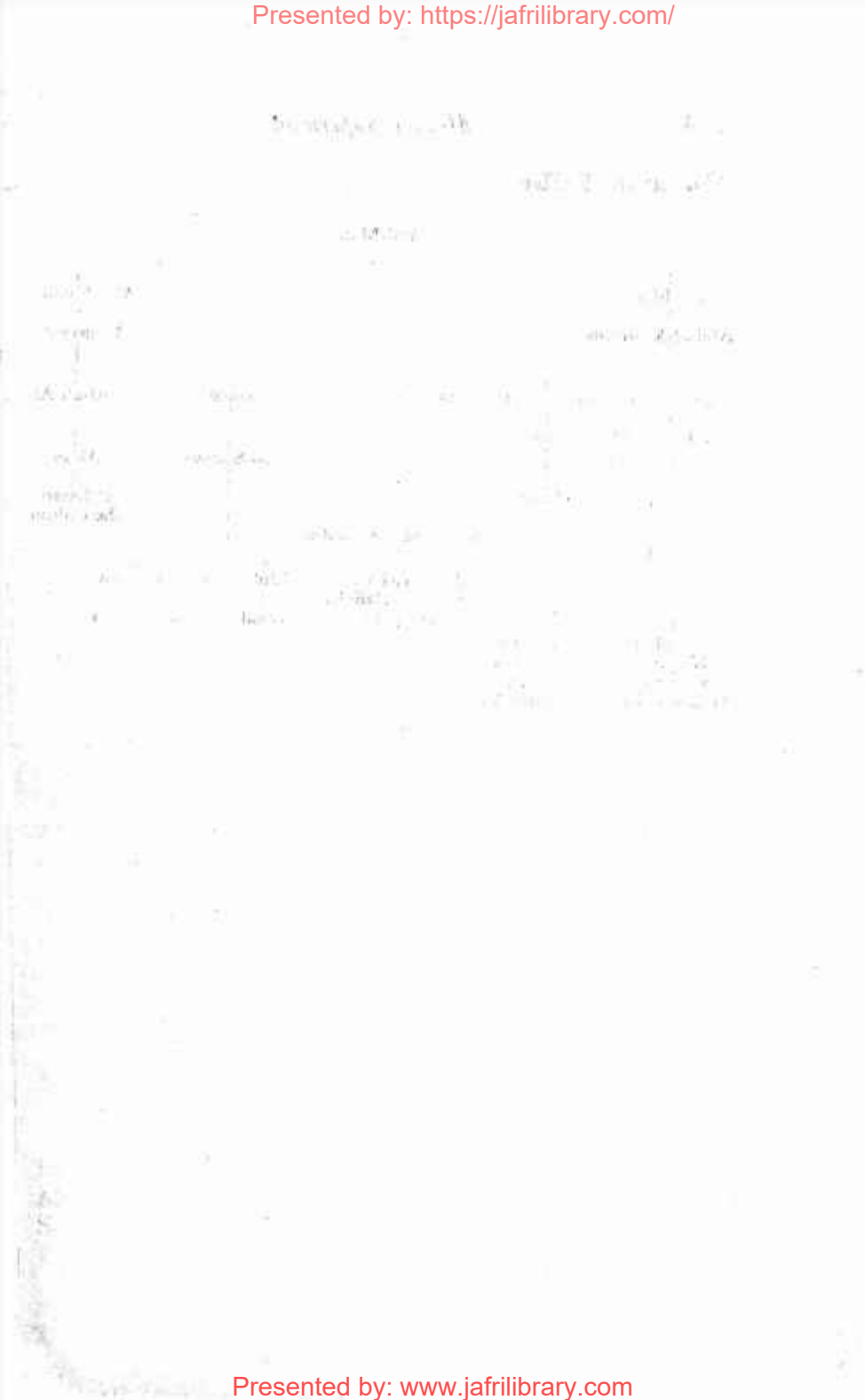
longer holding Egypt together.

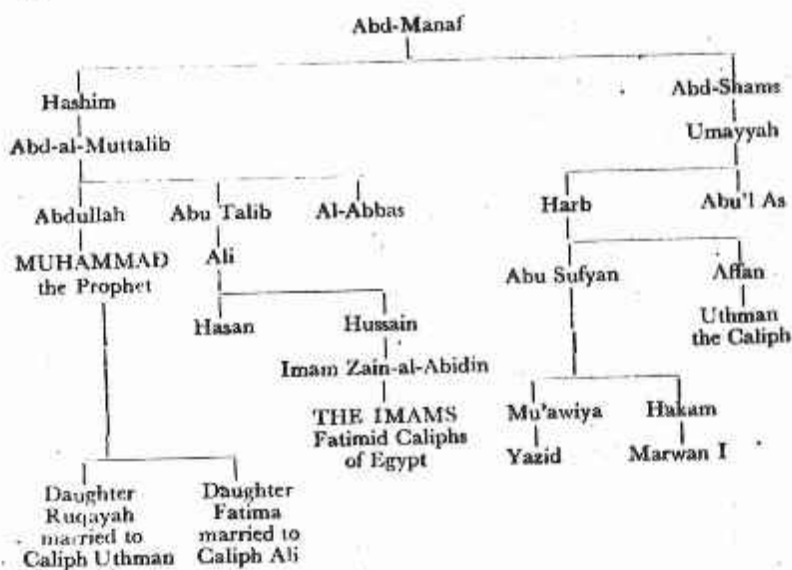
### **Ali's Dilemma**

Back in Kufa, Ali was once again confronted with an all-too-familiar dilemma. If he identified himself with the regicides, he would be undone, while if he took an action against them his position would be even more perilous. Admittedly the majority of the Kufans were on his side, but Kufa was not the only place which had to decide the issue of the Caliphate. Several of the Umayyads, still using as their slogan the words "Vengeance for Uthman" under which Aishah's forces had marched, had formed strong political parties against Ali in Mecca, in the Yemen and in other provincial towns. In spite of his generous treatment of the people of Busra, Ali found only lukewarm supporters there and at Bahrian the people now began to withhold payment of tribute and taxes. Undermined by Mu'awiya's constant propaganda, the Persian provinces grew lax in their allegiance and many of the malcontents openly deserted to Mu'awiya. By making Kufa his capital, Ali appeared to have declared himself for the regicides and certainly he was now completely in the hands of that treacherous and volatile people.

### **Mu'awiya Sees his Way Clear to the Caliphate**

Meanwhile Mu'awiya rejoiced. With Qais gone from Egypt, that country would soon be on his side. With Talha and Zubair killed by Ali's forces at the Battle of Camel, Mu'awiya's two greatest potential rivals had been removed from his path. Now only Ali stood between him and the Caliphate and Ali's position at Kufa was so precarious that Mu'awiya knew that the fruition of his very carefully laid plans could only be a matter of time.



**Quraish Tribe**

## CHAPTER XIII

### MU'AWIYA

#### **Mu'awiya as governor of Syria**

Let us now turn to Ali's enemy, Mu'awiya, who had been appointed by Umar the Great as governor of Syria, who had remained in office throughout the reign of Uthman and was still governor of Syria at the time of Ali's accession. During his governorship of twenty years Mu'awiya had won the hearts of the Syrians who served him with unflinching fidelity; he, in his turn, had successfully identified himself with their interests.

Syria, in those days, consisted of four provinces: Palestine, Damascus, Urwan, and Hims. Besides these four provinces, Mu'awiya was also incharge of Armenia and what the Arab geographers called "Jazera". A great many emigrant tribes had settled in Syria and these Arabs were more than willing to defend the frontiers of the country that had become their home. Unlike the neighbouring territory of Iraq, which had had a great many governors, Syria had been able to develop a strong sense of unity because it had been ruled for so long by one man, Mu'awiya.

#### **Mu'awiya's lineage**

Mu'awiya was a collateral of the Holy Prophet, both being descended from a common ancestor, Abd-Manaf, Mu'awiya's father was the Quraish magnate Abu-Sufyan, who had so long held out against the Holy Prophet and who had not accepted Islam until

Muhammad (may peace be upon him) finally occupied Mecca. The historian, Dozy,<sup>1</sup> comments forcefully on Mu'awiya's pedigree in the following words:-

"Who was there that did not shudder at the recollection that Abu Sufyan-father of that Mu'awiya, whom Uthman had appointed governor of Syria—had been in command of the army which had defeated Muhammad at Uhud, and of that which besieged him in Medina? Leader of the Meccans, he did not yield until he saw that his cause was lost, and that ten thousand Muslims were ready to overwhelm him and his adherents. Even then, when called upon by Muhammad to acknowledge him as the Messenger of God, he replied, "Pardon my candour—but I still feel some doubt upon that point." "Bear witness to the Prophet, or your headfalls" was the reply. Convinced by this final argument, Abu Sufyan became a Muslim; but so short was his memory, that a moment later he had forgotten his conversion.

Who again, was there who did not remember Hind, Mu'awiya's mother—the atrocious woman who had made necklaces and bracelets of the ears and noses of the Muslims slain at Uhud—the woman who had ripped open the body of Humza, the Prophet's uncle, and tearing thence the liver had rent it with her teeth? Offspring of such a father and such a mother, "son of the liver-eater" as he was called—was it possible that Mu'awiya could be a true Muslim? His enemies boldly declared that he was not."

### **Mu'awiya's Religion**

It has, indeed, often been alleged that Mu'awiya, although outwardly observant of all religious duties was, in his hearts, an Umayyad aristocrat first and a Muslim afterwards. With him religion was more a matter of policy than of conviction and faith. He had perceived at an early date that the royal sceptre which could place

1. Reinhart Dozy—*Spanish Islam*. p. 28-29. Publishers Chatto & Windus. London. 1913.

every worldly advantage at his feet, could only be attained if he assumed the role of a Caliph. To that end he opposed Ali, using as his justification the charge of Ali's complicity in Uthman's murder, a charge he well knew to be baseless. Crying and posing as the avenger of Uthman's murder, Mu'awiya denied Ali's authority, not only on political grounds, but also on religious grounds, claiming that he and not Ali had the exclusive prerogative of taking up arms on behalf of the wronged family of the Umayyads. Such talk of religious duty came strangely from the lips of the man in whose veins flowed the blood of the two of the most notorious enemies of Islam.

### **The Career and Personality of Mu'awiya**

During his youth, Mu'awiya is said to have lived in Medina and to have been the amanuensis of the Holy Prophet's "Revelations", but it was not until Umar's accession to the Caliphate that his political career may be said to have begun. Umar made him the governor of Syria, an appointment which Mu'awiya saw as the first step towards his ultimate ambition, though no one else at that time was aware of his schemes for self-aggrandisement. What the Syrians saw in him was an Arab aristocrat who knew the art of "mellowing their heart" by gifts and concessions and who did not embarrass them by being an idealist, a dedicated man, a fanatic or a "puritan". His great personal charm, his affability, his attractive and pleasant disposition and his gay manners, coupled with such gift of the gab that the Arabs styled him "the silver tongued", won the hearts of all those with whom he came in contact. His intelligence and sagacity showed itself in the pursuit of literature and poetry. His shrewdness and vivacity was displayed in his speech, in which humour and wit never forsook him. For many Arabs, this attractive, though somewhat irreligious autocrat, was their "beau ideal", just as, some forty years before, the young and zealous Ali had been.

In many Arab eyes Mu'awiya fulfilled all the monarchic concepts cherished by their nation. His light-hearted manner did not conceal from them the keenness of his judgment and the astuteness of his mind, his cunning and crafty manipulation of rumour and the skill with which he prepared his propaganda served only to increase their admiration. When beset with the most overwhelming difficulties, and in extreme danger, Mu'awiya could also be relied upon to show an unparalleled presence of mind and a cool courage which could not fail to extract homage from all.

On the other hand, his indulgence in sensual pleasure, in which he luxuriated with a cynical shamelessness, aroused the disgust of the puritannical Medinites and the more orthodox of the Muslims.

Andre Servier<sup>1</sup> summarises Mu'awiya's character and ambition as follows:

"As a matter of fact, Mu'awiya cared little about the call of the blood but was tortured by ambition. He was very popular in Syria, through his open-handedness, his luxurious court, and his liberalism. He had moreover, amassed considerable wealth, had set up an army of his own, and aspired to the Caliphate.

The moment seemed him to be propitious. Ali counted but few friends. The murder of Uthman, of which he was innocent, but which was nevertheless laid to his charge, had cost him the moral support of the masses. Mu'awiya calculated that whenever he should take up the position of the avenger of his old relative he would receive unanimous approval but above all he counted upon his money to bring him adherents. He had besides one valuable auxiliary, Amr the conqueror of Egypt, who was popular throughout Islam, and who, on his dismissal by Uthman, had thrown in his lot with the Quraish."

### **The career of Amr bin As**

The character and personality of Amr bin As was

1. Andre Servier—*Islam and the psychology of the Muslim*. p. 99.

### *Mu'awiya*

bound to appeal to a man of Mu'awiya's nature. Amr's career was as romantic as the good fortune which befell him and he was also, perhaps, next to Mu'awiya, the most wily politician of his time. He had accepted Islam in 629 A.D. and by the year 633 A.D. had been appointed by the Caliph Abu Bakr to conduct operations in Palestine, where he came into the lime-light by subjugating a major portion of the province. He is further said to have rendered loyal and active help to the Islamic Commonwealth in the battles of Ajnadyn and Yarmuk, and the capture of Damascus, but it is as conqueror of Egypt, in the reign of Umar the Great, that he is most widely known. In 640 A.D. he is described as having defeated the Greeks at Heliopolis and to have overrun Alexandria and, later, Babylonia. Amr also founded the city of Fustat, (Misr of the Arab writers) and erected a mosque in old Cairo which bears his name to this day.

When Caliph Uthman deposed him from the governorship of Egypt and replaced him by Abdullah bin Sa'd, Amr was far too wily to make an open alliance with the seditious parties that were beginning to spring up, although he is now known to have secretly encouraged them and also to have attempted to incite Talha and Zubair—even Ali—to rise against Uthman. After Ali's installation as Caliph, Amr expected the governorship of Egypt to be restored to him, instead of which he was dismissed. He never forgave Ali for thus disappointing him.

Mu'awiya saw his opportunity. In a letter to Amr, then in Palestine, he urged him to make common cause against the man who had so arbitrarily dismissed them both and as a result of negotiations both agreed to use their joint efforts to protract the discontent. This unholy alliance seemed to both of them their only hope of survival. Both of them knew that unless they pooled their resources and strength, they were no match for Ali's design and power. The union of these two chieftains, renowned for their Machiavellian tactics, their duplicity

and skill in statecraft was further strengthened when Mu'awiya agreed to bestow the governorship of Egypt on Amr, if their designs should succeed. For Mu'awiya, it was a case of life or death: Ali had already dismissed him from the governorship of Syria, and if he was to survive he could only do so by reducing Ali. Amr, on his side, easily forgave the dead Uthman who had dismissed him from Egypt, and realised that his safety lay in adopting the role of Uthman's avenger.

When Ali defeated Talha, Zubair and Aishah at Busra, Ali appeared to have got the upper hand of Amr and Mu'awiya but his openness and clemency were to prove no match for the crafty pair. Mu'awiya's wonderful propaganda, his wily strategy and dare-devil schemes—in all of which he was most ably assisted by Amr—compel the admiration of military experts and laymen alike. They were masterpieces, even though they were masterpieces of deceit and villainy.

### **Mu'awiya's Propaganda**

From the very beginning of Ali's Caliphate Mu'awiya's propaganda was at work. The display of the blood-stained garments of Uthman and the amputated fingers of Na'ila quickly aroused the emotions of the people to fever-pitch and Mu'awiya had no difficulty in extracting from them a mass promise to avenge Uthman's blood. They readily swore allegiance to him, not as Caliph, but as their leader in this resolve. With all the vehemence at his command, he daily addressed the congregations in the principal mosque at Damascus, accusing Ali of having sacrificed the innocent lamb of Uthman to further his ambitious designs of kingship. He further emphasized that the election of Ali was highly irregular and illegal, in so much as it was not endorsed by the voice of all the people of the Arabian peninsula, and he maintained, from the outset, that the allegiance of Talha and Zubair had only been obtained by coercion.

At the news of Ali's victory over Talha and Zubair, and of the augmentation of his forces, Mu'awiya was obliged to reconsider his position. He decided to take no hasty steps but to continue with his insidious propaganda. Talha and Zubair, he now presented to the people as martyrs, the noble defenders of Uthman who gave their lives in protest against this illegal election. Ali had pursued and harassed all those who had objected to the illegality of his election, with a sword in his hand, and after having obtained a victory over the confederates of Mecca, had stifled all democratic germs in an unconstitutional manner. The stigma of ill-treating the Prophet's widow, Aishah, could not be washed away and if it were true that Ali had shown moderation and kindness towards her, then it was nothing short of a ruse to protect himself against the growing wrath of the nation.

Ali had already contemplated invading Syria, before the rebellion of Talha and Zubair, and the renewed threat to their liberties further united the Syrians behind their deposed governor. The extent of their devotion is well illustrated by their response to a particularly impassioned sermon of Mu'awiya's: "Countrymen, said Mu'awiya from the pulpit, "tell me, will you forsake me in so just a cause and at such a critical moment? If for retaliating Uthman's blood, I give up my life, am I not justified, by trying to avenge the murder of a ruler who was your patron and a benevolent father to you?" To such overtures the Syrian crowd declared. "We will not wash with water, nor sleep on beds, till we have slain the murderers of Uthman and their abettors, root and branch."

It is possible that, if Ali had pressed his advantage after the Battle of Camel, history would have had a different story to tell; but, Mu'awiya was whipping up mass emotions and telling the people that Syria was in danger. All that Ali had done was to write yet another letter of conciliation.

**Ali's Letter from Kufa**

While Ali was consolidating his power at Kufa, he made another abortive attempt to get Mu'awiya to do him homage. He sent his trustworthy ambassador, Jarir ibn Abdullah, with a letter and asked Mu'awiya to submit to his authority for the solidarity of Islam. Mu'awiya as usual detained Ali's envoy and wrote a letter to Amr bin As, asking him to advise him what steps to take, and also begging him to come in person to discuss the matter with him.

**Amr bin As Joins Mu'awiya at Damascus**

Mu'awiya, as usual, daily harangued Ali from the pulpit and on one Friday in his Khutba, dwelt at length on the importance of the divine commands of "Jihad" wherein it was incumbent upon every male Muslim to draw sword for the defence of justice. "How long" said he, "will you remain passive spectators to a reign of terror? It behoves every believer to put an end to it."

Hardly was the impassioned discourse of Mu'awiya finished then Amr bin<sup>1</sup> As arrived at Damascus, with a body of troops from Palestine. Some chroniclers hold that the meeting had been artfully pre-arranged in order to give a colourful ending to the dramatic speech which had deeply stirred the people. At the news of Amr's arrival, Mu'awiya descended from the pulpit to go and meet him, and the entire assembly followed at his heels. As they approached the square where Amr stood with his Palestinian soldiers, Mu'awiya told the congregation that Amr's arrival was nothing short of a miracle, while Amr, at the sight of Mu'awiya, fell prostrate before him and, swearing the oath of fealty acknowledged him as<sup>1</sup> Caliph.

1. Some writers say that Amr's oath of allegiance at this stage was only a friendly gesture and that Mu'awiya was not proclaimed Caliph till 40 A.H. (661 A.D.) in Jerusalem.

## **Mu'awiya is Acknowledged Caliph**

The people were, for the most part, quick to imitate the lead Amr had given them and followed his example in paying homage to Mu'awiya. Soon the entire capital of Damascus was tumultuous with acclamations of 'Long live Mu'awiya' our chosen' Caliph! With the spread of the news of Mu'awiya's inauguration, people from the far flung districts of Syria hurried to Damascus to swear allegiance to their chief. "This resolution," says the Abbe de Marigny,<sup>2</sup> "was by so much the more formidable as Mu'awiya had gained the greatest reputation among those he governed: besides Syria was a very extensive province, and capable of receiving assistance from foreigners, by means of its sea ports on the Mediterranean."

## **Mu'awiya's Policy as Caliph**

Mu'awiya's policy as Caliph can be epitomised in one word selfaggrandisement. It was his ruling passion and his only real interest. Wars, intrigues, and the cloak of religion with which they were covered, were the ruses for the achievement of that objective. He had no scruples about how he might bring it about, and as in his eyes the end justified the means, it was of small importance whether the means adopted were fair or foul. In order to clarify the fundamentals of his policy, Mu'awiya used to say that he followed the following motto for its realisation: "I apply not my sword where my lash suffices, nor my lash where my tongue suffices. And even if there be one thread binding me to my

1. Yaqubi, the Shia writer maintains that the first to offer allegiance to Mu'awiya was Amr (Yaqubi. Vol. I. p. 315), while in other traditions, Mu'awiya's governor of Hims, Shirjeel ibn Usmit, was held as the first to take the oath of allegiance to him. It is difficult to ascertain who was the first to offer allegiance. They generally held surmise that Amr advised Mu'awiya to ask the people to give "Bait" can hardly fit in with the facts. When Ali was elected it was by the Muhajirs and Ansars of Medina, in comparison with whom men like Amr bin As and Shirjeel bin Usmit were almost nonentities.

2. Abbe de Marigny—The history of the Arabian Caliphs. Vol. II p. 47.

fellowmen, I do not let it break; when they pull I loosen, and if they loosen, I pull. "Mu'awiya would never resort to violence unless his wealth failed to purchase loyalty. He would keep secret thoughts to himself and in order to win over his enemies, he would throw money away like water.

Mu'awiya came to know of a certain Abul Khair, who was a great warrior of note but who was his enemy. Abul Khair was a Kharajite and had religious views poles apart from those of Mu'awiya. The astute Mu'awiya soon instructed his deputy Ziyad to win him over to his side. Ziyad had him appointed to the government of Nishapur on a monthly salary of 4000/- dirhem, and thus he became the supporter of Mu'awiya and his cause.

Professor Wellhausen<sup>1</sup> sums up Mu'awiya's brand of diplomacy as follows:

"Rude and passionate scenes never affected him; he bore himself like an old Arab sayyid. God had not granted him the gift of a personal courage although he unremittingly sent his Syrians into the field against the Romans but in all the greater degree did he possess other qualities of the Sayyids the prudent mildness by which he disarmed and shamed the opposition; slowness to anger; and the most absolute self-command. As a pattern of these qualities he figures in innumerable stories, along with the Temimite Ashnaf, his contemporary, whom he highly esteemed. He was essentially a diplomat and politician, allowing matters to ripen of themselves, and only now and then assisting their progress, it might be by the use of a little poison."

An Arab chronicler compares Mu'awiya with a camel who, when left alone would go on walking but who, when beaten, would halt and refuse to move. It was not in stubbornness, however, that the secret of Mu'awiya's success lay but in his personal charm, his courtesy and his tactful diplomacy.

1. J. Wellhausen—*The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall*. p 138. Translation by Margaret Graham. Publishers University of Calcutta. Edition 1927.

The most outstanding example of his diplomatic success is furnished by Iraq—the country which was won over by diplomacy alone.

### **The Adoption of Byzantine Methods**

Mu'awiya was essentially a man of his time, prepared to seize every advantage and to try out every new method that came his way. It particular he imitated the Graeco-Byzantine tactics and methods.

Before their conquest by Islam, the Arabs who lived on the Syrian border had formed the Ghassanid kingdom under the Graeco-Roman Emperors and in their craze for imitating the culture of the Greeks they had adopted Christianity, the religion of their masters and had cultivated a life which was even more Hellenic than that of Greek inhabitants. When Mu'awiya became the governor of Syria, he could hardly escape the Greek influence, and indeed he hellenised his province to an even greater degree than the Ghassanid rulers had done. He was the first of the Muslim rulers to introduce pomp and majesty into his court, in imitation of the refinement and luxury of Hellenic life, and in great contrast to the simple and austere piety of the early rulers of Islam. He was, as Andre Servier says of him, "a Bedouine and a hedonist in one". Mu'awiya greatly enjoyed pomp and ceremony but he never forgot why he was behaving as he did. He knew that his lavish ostentation, his costly palaces, his constant display of power, won the admiration of his subjects and increased their dependence upon him for his bounty. The Syrians, who had been influenced by the pleasure-loving Greeks, much approved of his wayward luxuriance, even though the rigidly orthodox Muslims began to depict him as selfish, vain frivolous and profane.

From the Greeks Mu'awiya also learned the value of keeping a standing army and he was the first Muslim ruler to do this. In order to crush Ali, he is also said, according to the Shi'ite legends to have entered into a

treaty with the Greeks, by which he pledged himself to pay an annual tribute to them—certainly a new experience for an Islamic sovereign. For Mu'awiya the end always justified the means.

### **The Efficiency of Mu'awiya's Administration in Syria**

Above all, Mu'awiya's administration in Syria was efficient. Under his rule Syria became prosperous as never before and its economic resources were developed so admirably that it was considered to be the best-administered province in the whole of the Islamic Commonwealth. Small wonder that his Syrian subjects loved him from the bottom of their hearts and that, when he commanded them to avenge Uthman's murder, they unanimously replied: "it is you who are to command and it is on us that the duty of obedience is laid."

### **The Undermining of Arab Democracy**

Mu'awiya, who was much addicted to mottoes, also said: "The world is more surely led by the tongue than the sword." To this end he continued to summon the Bedouine "Wufuds" or "Deputations from the tribes and Provinces" in order to consult their views. In theory Mu'awiya recognised the rights of the Arabs to hear and discuss affairs of state, but in practice these assemblies were completely dominated by Mu'awiya, who well knew his own powers of public persuasion.

It was in this indirect way that he broke the rebellions and democratic spirit of the Bedouine, without letting them feel that their institutions had been destroyed. No murmur arose against his high-handed proposals and, without realising their subservience, the Bedouine constantly concurred in his imperialistic designs.

## **Transformation of the Character of the Caliphate**

Amongst the Muslim rulers, Mu'awiya is reproached for being the first to transform the character of the Caliphate (Vicarate of the Prophet) into the "Mulookiat" (temporal sovereignty) through the secularisation of the supreme power. It was a conception of sovereignty which appealed to the men of his time and no Arab sovereign has left such a stamp of originality or so deep an impression on history as this genius in statecraft. Like the later European monarchs, Frederic the Great or Louis XIV of France, he moulded his policy to suit his own ends. He was the King, the Caliph, the Prime Minister, all in one, and it would have been no exaggeration for him to have said, "The State, it is I."

In addition to establishing a precedent for an absolute monarchy, Mu'awiya also introduced the conception of primogeniture, nominating his son, Yezid, as his successor. The innovation changed the entire outlook of the Caliphate in the realm of ethics, of religion and of justice. The ancient Arab concept of democracy was dealt its death blow.

Commenting on this change in the nature of Caliphate Professor Freeman<sup>1</sup> writes as follows:—

"But in thus converting the Caliphate into a hereditary monarchy he utterly changed its character. It soon assumed the character of a common oriental empire. Under the Umayyad dynasty we soon begin to hear of the same crimes, the same oppressions, which disfigure the ordinary current of Eastern history. The first Caliphs had been the chief among their brethern, they took counsel with the people in the mosque, their authority rested on the reverence of believers for their spiritual head. The Umayyads were masters of slaves instead of leaders of freemen, the public was no longer consulted and the public good as little, the Commander of the Faithful sank into an earthly despot,

1. Edward. A. Freeman—The history and conquest of the Saracens. p. 72-73. Publishers Macmillan & Co. 1876.

ruling by force like an Assyrian conqueror of old. The early Caliphs dwelt in the sacred city of Medina, and directed the counsels of the empire from besides the tomb of the Prophet. Mu'awiya transferred his throne to the conquered splendours of Damascus; and Mecca and Medina become the tributary cities to the ruler of Syria. At one time a rival Caliph, Abdullah established himself in Arabia; twice were the holy cities taken by storm and the Kab'ah itself was battered down by the engines of the invaders. No avenging birds appeared to visit the fierce Hajjaj with the fate of Abrahah; and the result of the mission of Muhammad and the conquest of his followers was practically to make his native country a subject province to the land which they had subdued."

From the day that Amr paid homage to Mu'awiya as Caliph, Muslim rulers were to exercise an indefeasible right of primogeniture and princes and kings were to be judged by their birth and not by their merit and character. The Khutba or public oration from the pulpit which had previously imparted a sacred oracular character to the Caliph became only an imperial order from Mu'awiya, designed to extract blind obedience for his unconstitutional acts. As time went on, the Caliphate became the prize of the strongest combatant, and although these secular rulers of the empire retained, in outward form at least, the spiritual claims of the vicarship of the Holy Prophet, the temporal character of the administration predominated. In the character of the first four Caliphs, Muslims all over the world recognised a sanctity—a special vicarship of the holy Prophet—which was sadly lacking in the subsequent rulers. Mu'awiya is looked upon as the man who was entirely responsible for this regrettable innovation.

In his monarchical ambitions Mu'awiya was to triumph over Ali; but he could not entirely triumph over the ethical principles for which that Caliph stood, lived and gave up his life.

**Mu'awiya's Hatred of Ali**

No one knows at what exact point Mu'awiya determined to become Caliph. On the accession of Ali it is possible that his primary objective was the retention of Syria, with perhaps the addition of Egypt, but his horizon must have widened as he witnessed the dissension amongst Ali's troops. As for his personal hatred of Ali, this was nothing new, reflecting as it did the old tribal rivalry between the Umayyads and the Hashimites in the pre-Islamic era. When Uthman was murdered, Mu'awiya was quick to revive this ancient enmity under the guise of "Vengeance for the fallen Uthman" and, although not a religious man himself, he now used Qur'anic injunctions to prove that the murderers of Uthman must be punished. Because religion was called in the old rivalry assumed terrible proportions and personal hatreds took on the appalling dimensions of a full-scale Civil War.

## CHAPTER XIV

# THE SECOND CIVIL WAR: THE BATTLE OF SIFFIN

### **Ali's abortive attempts for peace**

When the news that Mu'awiya had assumed sovereign powers reached Ali, he made one last effort to win the Syrians to his side by peaceful means. He declared a general amnesty to all those who had hitherto sided with Mu'awiya, calling them to repentance and emphasising the divine nature of forgiveness. His clemency met with no response and he was reluctantly obliged to declare war against them.

With an army of some 90,000 strong, mainly recruited from Iraq, Ali set out from Kufa, planning to march through Upper Mesopotamia and invade Syria from the North. An advance guard, which he sent along the Western bank of the Euphrates met with opposition from the enemy and was forced to retreat to Mesopotamia but the main body of troops, under the command of Ali, advanced upto the Tigris and then turning West, marched across the Mesopotamian desert.

The long trek across the desert exhausted Ali's water supplies and the troops were in desperate straits as they neared the Syrian border.

### **Miracles in Ali's camp**

Ali sent out scouts to enquire of neighbouring tribesmen if there were any wells or springs which could supply water to the troops. Ali had heard that, hundreds of

years previously, the Israelite Patriarchs had dug wells in these parts and he hoped to be able to find out these ancient sites. His scouts were unsuccessful but one of them brought back with him an old Christian hermit who confessed to Ali that there was indeed a cistern in the neighbourhood but that it had gone dry. In response to Ali's questions about ancient wells the old man said, "Old legends say that a hidden well exists and that its mouth is covered with an enormous stone, but no one knows where it is. According to popular belief none can locate it except a prophet or the representative of a Prophet."

Ali then ordered his men to dig near a huge stone that he remembered to have seen and it was not long before a spring was discovered which was more than adequate for the needs of the troops. As the waters gushed forth, the hermit fell at Ali's feet and accepted Islam, saying that Ali must indeed be the representative of the Holy Prophet.

The hermit then returned to his cell to fetch a piece of old parchment which he gave to Ali. This document was from the hand of Simon, son of Cephas, an apostle of Jesus Christ and it contained a prophecy of the advent of the Last Prophet and a reference to the lifting of the stone.

The news of the miraculous discovery of the well so impressed the Muslim tribes living in the neighbourhood that they all went over to Ali's side against Mu'awiya. The miracle which, according to tradition, was one of a number of miraculous happenings at this encampment, also put new heart into the troops who had crossed the desert with Ali, and they were now eager to come to grips with the Syrian enemy.

### **The Advance to Siffin**

Ali, then pushed on to Ar-Raqa, on the left bank of the Euphrates. Here his troops came across the Syrian vanguard but it withdrew without engagement. The

next problem was how to cross the river. Ali wanted to construct a bridge of boats but the people of Ar-Raqa were un-co-operative and even hostile. It was only after Ali's general, Ashtar, had threatened them with death that they consented to help in building the bridge which was completed under the greatest difficulties.

Having forced a crossing, Ali's men then advanced along the right bank of the river in the direction of Aleppo. At Sur-Rum they had a brief skirmish with a Syrian outpost before they reached the plain of Siffin, where they found Mu'awiya's forces drawn up in strength and waiting for them.

Ali soon discovered that the Syrian positions controlled the watersupply of the whole valley and that there was no access to the river at any place for his men. Mu'awiya obviously intended to use thirst to drive Ali's men to surrender or die. The leader of the Syrians had, however, underestimated the calibre of Ali's troops who were not disposed to accept defeat as readily as Mu'awiya had hoped.

Ali's commander, Ashtar, immediately challenged the Syrian Commander to single combat but Amr bin As, Mu'awiya's general, who also had two of his own sons commissioned in the Syrian Forces, refused to allow any of his officers to accept the challenge, replying that those whose hands had been made crimson by Uthman's blood were not entitled to fight according to the rules of honourable warfare.

Ali was now in a quandary. Either his troops must surrender or he must wage general battle, but how long could the men fight without water. Once again he decided to write to Mu'awiya a letter at once conciliatory and threatening. The letter ran as follows:—

“You have fore-stalled me in pitching the stables for the horses of your cavalry. Before I could declare war on you, you have declared war on us. It was bad move on your part to cut off our supply of water. It behoves you to allow us the natural

supply of water. Failing this, we will be reluctantly forced to fight with you."

### **The Battle for Water**

On receiving this letter, Mu'awiya conferred with his advisers who, with the sole exception of Amr bin As, urged him not to yield up the advantage he had gained. Ali was therefore left with no alternative but to attack and he inflicted a crushing defeat on Mu'awiya's forces.

Now it was the turn of Ali's counsellors to urge control of the water-supplies and for the soldiers of Mu'awiya to suffer the rigours of extreme thirst. But Ali ordered his men to allow the Syrians free access to the river saying:—

"Our religion and ethical code does not permit us to stop the supply of water, and so pay our enemy back in his own coin. I do not want to follow the way of the ignorant people. We will put the Book of God before our enemy and invite them to follow its guidance. Should they hearken unto us, it will be well and good; otherwise the sword will be the best arbiter between us."

### **Further Overtures for Peace**

Ali's next step was, as usual, to try and come to a peaceful settlement. He deputed Bashir bin Amr, Saed bin Qais and Sha'us bin Rabi to wait upon Mu'awiya and ask him to take the oath of allegiance to Ali. Mu'awiya's reply to the delegates, who seem to have been lacking in diplomacy and tact, was to demand vengeance on the murderers of Uthman. Nor had Mu'awiya much cared for their demand for unconditional surrender.

### **e One Hundred and Ten Days**

Ali still did not give up hope but a second delegation,

consisting of Adi bin Hatim, Yazid bin Qais, Ziyad bin Hufza and Shabis bin Rad, also failed to persuade Mu'awiya to come to an amicable settlement in favour of Ali. For the next three months, Dhul Haj, Muharram and Safar 36 A.H. (May, June and July 657 A.D.) the armies remained in camp at Siffin, facing each other neither officially at war nor at peace. This period of negotiations lasted one hundred and ten days, during which time, the Arab Chroniclers maintain, Ali made as many overtures for peace as there were days. There was much heat in the discussions with Mu'awiya but little light and finally Ali was obliged, once again, to resort to arms.

### **Composition of the Armies**

It seems certain that Mu'awiya commanded a greater number of forces than Ali. Some accounts estimate Ali's army at Siffin as 70,000 strong, others at 90,000 men while Mu'awiya is reputed to have had either 100,000 or 110,000 men in the field. All accounts refer, however, to the numerical superiority of the Syrian forces.

The battle array followed the old tribal pattern of Arab warfare on both sides, with the troops divided into tribal units. Among Mu'awiya's troops the tribes of Hims and Kinaryan were conspicuous for their devotion to his cause. Ali's army could boast of its "Crops of Green", a column of 4,000 men who had sworn to fight to the death and whose distinguishing mark was a green turban. Masudi speaks of 2,800 companions of the Holy Prophet who had joined Ali's army and were eager to shed their last drop of blood in order to consolidate Islam and crush the schismatic tendencies in Islam. What is certain is that there were many men on both sides who were fanatically devoted to the causes for which they were fighting.

During the one hundred and ten days of negotiation the chroniclers tell us that no fewer than ninety skirmi-

shes were fought. Almost every day one tribal column would engage an enemy in combat, sometimes two or more engagements would be fought in one day. The weapons used in these skirmishes were the usual shields, swords, bows and arrows, lances and javelins and it is thought that some 25,000 Muslims were slain on Ali's side and some 45,000 of Mu'awiya's men in these unnecessary trials of strength, while the leaders of both sides dared not commit their armies as a whole to what could only result in annihilation.

Heartbroken at the amount of Muslim blood that had already been shed in vain, Ali made one last bid for peace with Mu'awiya, at the beginning of the New Year. Finding this unavailing he then caused proclamations to be made along the front ranks of the Syrians, urging them to repent and to join forces with him so that they might save themselves in the next world by swearing allegiance to the rightful Caliph before death overtook them in this filthy world. These proclamations failed to bring about the desired result but they infuriated the Syrians to such an extent that they resolved to stand by Mu'awiya more loyally than ever. In the field of propaganda Ali could never hope to equal the crafty Mu'awiya, for the tribesmen constantly misunderstood the complete simplicity of Ali's motives and his straightforward desire to avoid blood-shed. They therefore attributed to Ali a duplicity of which he was not guilty. With Mu'awiya they felt they knew where they stood and to him they gave their loyalty more strongly than even before. Besides Mu'awiya's immense treasure could easily buy them.

### **The Indecisive Battle of Siffin, 8th Safar<sup>1</sup> 37 A.H. (Wednesday the 26th July 657 A.D.)**

At long last, Ali decided on a general engagement,

1. Sir William Muir (*The Caliphate, its rise, Decline and Fall*, p. 261) places this incident on the 29th July whereas Wellhausen (*The Arab Kingdom and its Fall* p. 78) establishes Wednesday, July 26th as the most probable date bringing forward irrefutable evidence in support of this.

but even then he could not bear to commit himself to a full offensive. Instead, he instructed his men to wait for the enemy to begin operations, to let the enemy make the first assault. Only then, fighting in self-defence, were they to display all the strength and valour that they could command. Ali further hedged them round with instructions about their conduct of the war—they were not to plunder or kill ruthlessly, or display any indecent or unbecoming behaviour towards women, and children, the aged or the sick. They were not to so much as raise a hand against any woman, no matter how insolent she might become nor to enter the homes of the enemy. Nor might they, under any circumstances, mutilate a dead body. In Ali's mind the thought seems ever to have been uppermost that the enemy were fellow-Muslims while in Mu'awiya's mind Ali and his forces were, first and foremost enemies, to be hated as such and treated as such.

"Ten days after the renewal of hostilities" says Sir William Muir<sup>1</sup> "both armies drawn out in entire array, fought till the shades of evening fell, neither having got the better. The following morning, the combat was renewed with greater vigour. Ali posted himself in the centre with the flower of his troops from Medina, and the wings were formed, one of the warriors from al-Basra the other of those from al-Kufa. Mu'awiya had a pavilion pitched on the field; and there, surrounded by five lines of his sworn body-guard, watched the day. Amr with a great weight of horse, bore down upon the al-Kufa wing which gave way; and Ali was exposed to imminent peril, both from thick showers of arrows and from close encounter. Reproaching the men of al-Kufa for their cowardice, the Caliph fought bravely, his unwieldy figure notwithstanding, sword in hand, and manfully withstood the charge. Ali's general Ashtar, at the head of 300 Readers (of the Qur'an) led forward the other wing, which fell with fury on Mu'awiya's "Turbaned" body-guard. Four of its five ranks were

1. Sir William Muir—*The Caliphate, its Rise, and Fall*. p. 261.

cut to pieces, and Mu'awiya, bethinking himself of flight, had already called for his horse, when a martial couplet flashed in his mind, and he held his ground. Amr stood besides him—"Courage today" he cried, "tomorrow victory". The fifth rank repelled the danger and both sides again fought on equal terms. Feats of desperate bravery were displayed by both armies and heavy was the carnage. On Ali's side fell Hashim bin Utba the hero of al-Qadisiya. Of even greater moment was the death of Ammar bin Jassar, now over ninety years, and one of the leading regicides. As he saw Hashim fall, he exclaimed, "Paradise! How close thou art beneath the arrow's barb and falchion's flash! O Hashim! even now I see heaven opened, and black-eyed maidens, bridally attired, clasping thee in their embrace!" So singing and refreshing himself with his favourite draught of milk and water, the aged warrior, fired with the ardour of youth, rushed into the enemy's rank and met the coveted death. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) had once been heard to say to him, "By a godless and rebellious race, o Ammar, thou shalt one day be slain" in other words, that Ammar would be killed fighting on the side of the right. Thus his death, as it were, condemned the rank against whom he fought and spread dismay in Mu'awiya's host. But Amr bin As answered readily: "And who is it that had killed Ammar, but Ali and the 'Rebellions race' that have brought him hither?" The clever repartee ran through the Syrian host, and did much to efface the evil omen."

The following morning the battle started up again with unprecedented vigour, as if each side had determined to make this day the witness of the last and decisive action. In this engagement tradition makes much of the heroism of Ali's general Ashtar, an Arab of the finest kind who possessed all the chivalrous qualities that the Arabs had long admired and who performed prodigies of valour. The verses of the poet Najashi describe his part in the battle in the following

immortal lines:—

“Incessantly the Syrians pressed  
Against them the batteringam of Iraq  
Displayed their valour unique  
Until Ashtar drove them back.”

As the day wore on, it became evident that, although Mu'awiya's forces were not yet defeated outright their position was definitely worsening. Having exhausted their arrows they had taken to pelting Ali's forces with stones; they next took to their javelins and lances until finally they were compelled to fall on Ali's troops with drawn swords. Even the approach of darkness failed to separate the combatants and for some hours a nocturnal battle was fought which, along with a similar occurrence at Qadisiya, earned the second night of the Battle of Siffin the name, “The Second Night of Clangour”.

In this nocturnal battle Ali was well in limelight. With his cousin Ibn Abbas, he stood firm as a rock, resisting onslaught after onslaught of enemy's force and killing, so the chroniclers assert, as many as five hundred men in single combat. By the end of the struggle it had become apparent that Ali's forces had gained the upper hand for the enemy dead were piled high on the battle-field. The victory was almost in sight.

The historian, Sir Edward Gibbon<sup>1</sup> describes Ali's part in the victory as follows:—

“The Caliph (Ali) displayed a superior character of valour and humanity. His troops were strictly enjoined to await the first onset of the enemy, to spare their flying brethren, and to respect the bodies of the dead, and the chastity of the female captives. The ranks of the Syrians were broken by the charge of the hero, who was mounted on a piebald horse, and wielded with irresistible force, his ponderous and two edged sword. As often as he smote a rebel, he shouted the

1. Edward Gibbon—The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Vol III, p. 522. Publishers Fredrick Warne & Co. London.

"Allah-ho-Akbar" ("God is great"). And in the tumult of a nocturnal battle, he was heard to repeat five hundred times that tremendous exclamation."

### **Ali Challenges Mu'awiya to Single Combat**

Appalled by the carnage, Ali sent a message to Mu'awiya and challenged him to single combat, saying that whoever won should be the Caliph. In Sir Edward Gibbon's words, "Ali generously proposed to save the blood of the Muslims by a single combat; but his trembling rival declined the challenge as a sentence of inevitable death. "Although advised by Amr bin As to accept the challenge, Mu'awiya would have none of it. Ali, he said, had never fought without killing his adversary in a hand-to-hand fight and he (Mu'awiya) had no desire to court his doom. Amr then expostulated with Mu'awiya, saying that his fair name would be tarnished if he declined the offer. Mu'awiya, in a great rage, turned on Amr and said, "O Amr! By the artifice of goading me to fight a duel you want to get rid of me so that you yourself may enjoy the fruits of Caliphate."

To Amr, Mu'awiya's refusal to fight against Ali must have appeared chicken-hearted in the extreme. Tradition suggests that Mu'awiya felt that his forces had already been outmanoeuvred in the field and that now, with defeat staring him in the face, his one thought was to save his skin. Amr bin As, on the other hand, believed that if they fled and were captured, their lives would certainly be forfeit and that their best chance of staying alive would be to remain where they were and to temporise and try to negotiate.

Whether or not Mu'awiya had indeed lost his nerve we do not know. He had never valued mere physical prowess highly, having always preferred to match his wit against his enemies' force of arms. What is known is that, by the next morning, he and Amr between them had devised a stratagem far more effective than any single combat, calculated as it was to sow discord among

Ali's forces.

Amr suggested to Mu'awiya that he should order his men to tie copies of the 'Qur'an to their lances and then appeal for a decision by the Book of the Lord rather than by the sword. Early next morning, with the panic-stricken Syrians on the verge of retreat Mu'awiya sounded his bugle and issued these instructions to his soldiers. So little did the Syrians care for their religious observance that only 5,000 copies of the Book of God could be found among the 100,000 but this difficulty was overcome by tearing leaves from the books which the Syrians then fixed to their lances.

By the time the sun was up the Syrians were already in position and were shouting at the top of their voice, "O ye men! O ye men of Iraq! Should you kill us what will become of our families and, should we slay you, what will become of your children and wives? Let us stop this mad warfare and resort to the decision of the Book of God."

At the head of Mu'awiya's forces was his famous counsellor, Abu-ul-Uoor Sulma, riding on a white mule and shouting loudly, "Who will defend the frontiers of Islam against the Persians and the Turks?" Soon batches of Syrian heralds were loudly shouting to Ali's army, "Let the blood of the Faithful cease to flow, and let the Book of the Lord decide our differences—a Book containing a complete code of ethics which prohibits the shedding of blood of the Believers-in-faith in vain. Let the majesty of the law and nothing but the law of God, be the arbiter."

Once again Mu'awiya's propaganda had achieved its object and his refusal to meet Ali in mortal combat, which most Arabs of his day would have despised as cowardly, was overlooked in the excitement of the hour and the arguments that followed.

### **The Men of Iraq Refuse to Fight Further**

As soon as the men of Iraq heard the appeal of their

enemies they asked Ali to sound a retreat. "We should respond to God's Book", they said, throwing down their arms. Soon every soldier in Ali's army was echoing the cry, "God's Book. Let nothing but the Law of Allah decide between us." At this Ali came forward and expostulated with his men, saying, "It is an infamous stratagem and a nefarious device of Amr and Mu'awiya to cloak their defeat. Believe me, neither Mu'awiya nor Amr bin As, has any regard for religion or for the Quran. Beware of the trick which they are playing upon us. Being men of honour, you should fight to a finish. "But Ali's men refused to fight for Ali." As Amr had predicted, the seed of discord had been sown in Ali's ranks. Ali's soldiers replied, "Since we are fighting for the sake of God, we cannot refuse arbitration based on the Book of God. How can we refuse to accept the Law of the Lord?"

At this Ali intervened and said, "We have to fight the pagans to teach them the lesson of resignation to God. Of all the people in this world, I will be the first to accept the decision of the Book of God, but I know full well that neither Mu'awiya nor Amr, nor Ibn Sarh, has any knowledge of the Qur'an or of the tenets of Islam. When young they were the worst of boys, and when grown up they were the worst of the youths. What they say is right, but the means which they intend to adopt for gaining their end are wicked and sinful. They are trying to trick us. Do not be deceived. Continue fighting and you will get a victory and do not stop until they surrender."

At this some 20,000 men of Ali's troops, led by Zaid bin Hasan and Mus'ur bin Fidki (afterwards becoming a Kharajite) laid down their arms. Their leaders approached Ali and, calling him no longer their Caliph but simply Ali declared, "O Ali! You are appealing to the sword and they are appealing to the Qur'an. Let the issue of the Caliphate be deferred to the judgment of God's Book and let us submit to God's words. Remember that, should you fail to recall your men,

the same fate awaits you that befell the Caliph Uthman."

Grief-stricken and heart-broken at the treachery of the men of Iraq, Ali exclaimed in great grief, "Alas! I see that you intend to desert me at the critical time of need. Go and join the Syrian coalition against God and His Apostle. At this they shouted, "Issue orders for Ashtar's recall from the battlefield and forthwith sound a general retreat." Some of the more insolent ones were vehement in their reproaches to Ali, and went to the length of murmuring, "Ali is self-seeking opportunist. How dare he object to the judgment of the Book of God" Some one said, "Ali played a leading part in the murder of Uthman, and then had the audacity to fight against Aisha, the Mother of the Faithful and now has led us to fight against our brother Syrians to quench his thirst for self-aggrandisement."

"Seeing opposition futile," Says Sir William Muir,<sup>1</sup> Ali said, "Stop these wild and treasonable words. Obey and fight. But if ye rebel, do as ye list." "We will not fight" they cried, "Recall Ashtar from the field." Al-Ashtar thus summoned at first refused. "We are gaining a great victory " he said, "I will not come" and he returned to fight again. But the tumult increased and Ali sent a second time to say "Of what avail is victory when treason rageth? Wouldst thou have the Caliph murdered or delivered over to the enemy? Ashtar unwillingly returned, and a fierce altercation ensued between him and the angry soldiery. Ye were fighting "he said," for the Lord, and the choicest among you lost their lives. What is it but that ye now acknowledge yourself in the wrong, and the martyrs therefore gone to hell? "Nay" they answered, "Yesterday we fought for the Lord and today for the same Lord, we stop the fight. "On this Ashtar upbraided them as traitors, cowards, hypocrites and villains. "In return they reviled him, and struck his charger with their whips."

1. Sir William Muir—*The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline and Fall.* p. 263.

**Ali Yields to His Own Army**

Thus Ali, with a great and glorious victory in sight, was compelled by the treachery of his own army to call a retreat. As a prisoner of his own forces he was obliged to depute his general Ashus bin Qais, the chief of the Banu Kinda, to approach Mu'awiya about the meaning of the Holy Book fixed on the lances. Mu'awiya replied, "We appeal from the decision of arms to the decision of the law of God. Let both sides retire from the Battlefield and let each side name a reliable arbiter and let them decide according to the Qur'an, and the traditions of the Holy Prophet, to whom the sovereignty should go. Let their verdict be binding on all."

To this proposal Ashus gave ready assent but when Ali heard of it his wrath knew no bounds. Asked by his warriors why he did not approve of the expedient, Ali replied in great indignation, "How can one who is not at liberty proffer any piece of advice? Manage the affair yourselves as you think best."

Indeed Ali was not allowed the slightest power, not even in the appointment of the religious arbiter who was to represent his cause.

**The Nomination of Ali's arbiter**

To arbitrate, ostensibly on Ali's behalf, the Iraqians chose an arch enemy of Ali, Abu Musa al-Ashari, the ex-governor of Kufa whom Ali had dismissed from that province and whose hatred for him ever since had been an open secret. Ali felt rightly that he could not expect justice and impartiality at the hands of such a man but his protests fell on deaf ears.

"Abu Musa" reiterated Ali, "has deserted us and has gone over to the enemy's side. He has neither fought on our side nor identified himself with our cause. He is my worst enemy. Here is a responsible and noble representative, Abdullah ibn Abbas. Choose him as your arbiter." From amongst his soldiers, a

voice was heard saying, "Why not as well choose yourself? Abdullah is your first cousin, and would be partial to you. We will have none but one who may judge impartially between us and the Syrians." Ali next proposed his general, Malik Ashtar. "What" said a Bedouine chief, "the same man who has set the Islamic world on fire? How can we expect moderation from one who is the principal actor in the drama of struggle? We will have none but Abu Musa. We will see that he adheres to the divine injunctions of the Qur'an." Ali had no alternative but to bow down and meekly accept the arbitration which had been thrust on him.

On Mu'awiya's side no such show of impartiality was made, who nominated as his arbiter his trusty friend Amr bin As whose cunning was already proverbial and who had been mainly responsible for the winning stratagem.

Ali and Mu'awiya both signed security deeds guaranteeing the security of the life and property of the arbiters, and of their families whatever the outcome of the arbitration might be.

### **Causes of Discontent in Ali's Army**

Undoubtedly Mu'awiya and Amr had been very clever but it would be an incorrect assessment to hold that the mere sight of the Holy Qur'ans could have turned Ali's men from a decisive victory unless other factors had also been involved. What was it that made men who had waded through torrents of blood for Ali and his cause suddenly lay down their arms and betray a legal and lawful Caliph?

Closer examination shows that the hostility of Ali's soldiery was no sudden development, whipped up to fever pitch by mob emotion. The ground for the rebellion had been long prepared by Mu'awiya, whose intelligence officers had never ceased their work of disruption amongst the Iraqi soldiery. Some of Ali's warriors had been bribed by Mu'awiya's men to keep aloof

from the battle and the chief of the Banu Rabi who was fighting on Ali's side was actually in the pay of the Syrians. Ali, who was blunt, plain-spoken, and tactless had done nothing to woo the Iraqians to his side, nor had he made to check the propaganda which was undermining his strength.

Also, a deplorable disunity existed amongst Ali's generals, in particular between his two greatest warriors, Malik Ashtar and Ashus bin Qais. Ashus as one of Uthman's nominees had been the governor of Azerbaijan, a post in which Ali had retained him. Ashtar, the chief magnate of Iraq, was Ali's commander-in-chief. He was suspected of having been the ring-leader of those regicides who had besieged Caliph Uthman's house and killed him and it was certainly he who had been instrumental in raising Ali to the Caliphate. Headstrong and fiery to the boot, Ashtar could not tolerate any opposition to his views. He hated Ashus and all those provincial governors who had been appointed by Uthman and when he heard that Ali had made Ashus the commander of a detachment his wrath knew no bounds.

In the opening stages of the Battle of Siffin it was Ashus who led the men to victory, securing their supplies of water and inflicting a sound defeat on the Syrians. Something seems, however to have cooled Ashus' zeal. Perhaps it was the jealousy and enmity of Ashtar, perhaps Ali's scrupulous honesty and his tactless ways of withholding his due measure of praise may have chilled down Ashus' fervour. Whatever the cause of his change of heart, Ashus remained aloof from the ensuing skirmishes, a passive spectator and unwilling to commit himself further in Ali's cause.

Some chroniclers assert that Mu'awiya had bribed Ashus to go over to his side or that he had at least persuaded him to use his power to stop the fighting. At the time when the Syrians had suffered their heaviest losses Ashus is said to have assembled the men of the Banu Kinda and addressed them thus:

BAITUL SAJJAD, OPP. NIKHTER PARK  
SOLDIER BAZAR, KARACHI

"O ye Muslims, you have witnessed what transpired today, how many Arab soldiers have been ruthlessly killed. I have become old, but never have I seen such dreadful carnage. Whosoever hears me, it behoves him to pass on my message to others, that we ought to resolve that we will not fight from henceforth and refrain from killing the Muslims. By God I am not telling you these things because I am afraid of war, or because cowardice has taken hold of me. I tell you these things because I pity the Muslim women and children, who will suffer and mourn the loss of those who fall and die."

Shortly after this speech, and as if at a given signal, the Syrians appeared with the leaves of the Qur'an on their lances, a ruse thought by some historians to have been long pre-meditated by Mu'awiya and not the sudden decision of the Night of Clangour that others would have us believe. In this context, the speech by Ashus might be held to have prepared the ground for the cessation of the hostilities.

It was Ashus too, who insisted on Ali recalling Ashtar from the field in the moment of decisive victory and again Ashus who forced Abu Musa on Ali as arbiter. It is difficult to determine the extent of Ashus' involvement with Mu'awiya but by whatever means Ashus arrived at his conclusion—whether by bribery or for personal reasons of his own—Mu'awiya saw to it that they were fully exploited. Mu'awiya's skilful propaganda and his success in convincing Ashus that all was not well with Ali's cause was the main reason why Ali's victory turned into defeat and Mu'awiya's defeat into victory.

No more important battle was ever fought in the whole history of Islam than the battle of Siffin. Its results were to prove as far-reaching as they were surprising.

## CHAPTER XV

ARBITRATION  
AND PRONOUNCEMENT**The Dispute Over the Preamble**

When the Security-deed had been signed, Mu'awiya's "Umpire", as the arbiter came to be called, went to Ali's camp to draw up the "Shaifa" or the Deed of Arbitration. Altercation began over the first sentence of the preamble. "In the name of Allah, the most Beneficent and Merciful! This is what has been agreed upon between Ali, the Commander of the Faithful and Mu'awiya." "Stay" said Amr bin As, "Ali is your Commander but he is not ours. We should be very wicked indeed should we declare war on one whom we acknowledge as the Commander of the Faithful of all." The followers on Ali's side counselled him not to give up the title, but recalling a precedent set by the Holy Prophet, Ali resolved to yield the point so that the arbiters could proceed with drafting of the deed itself.

The precedent to which Ali referred had occurred when one Sohail had led a rebellion against the government of Medina and had refused to recognise a preamble in which the Holy Prophet had referred to himself as "The Apostle of God". Sohail had objected to this, pointing out "If I recognise Muhammad as the Prophet of God, I should have no peace to sign, for I could not declare war against him. When Muhammad heard of the difficulty, he ordered, "Delete these words, for my title in no wise depends upon the credence of this deed. Time will reveal the truth of my mission."

Then, turning to Ali, who as the Holy Prophet's secretary, was drafting the treaty, Muhammad went on to say, "Remember a day will come when you will find yourself confronted by the same dilemma." Ali now therefore agreed to forego the title of Caliph in the preamble to the "Shifa".

### **Completion of the Deed**

With the preamble agreed on, the rest of the Deed was quickly drawn up, ratified and signed by a number of leading chiefs. The gist of the treaty bound the contracting parties to follow the injunctions of the Qur'an and, in the absence of any clear cut rulings, to be bound by the Sunnah, or Traditions of the Holy Prophet, and the precedents of Islam. The Umpires, who had been given a promise by the people that their decision would be upheld, were enjoined to be judicious. In the event of the Umpires agreeing their judgment was to be considered binding on both parties and all Muslims.

This decision was to be pronounced sixth months after the cessation of hostilities and the Umpires were to be allowed extra time if they could show any reasonable cause for delay. Meanwhile both signatories to the treaty were to march back to their respective provinces with all their soldiery. Their judgment would be given on a neutral spot midway between Kufa and Damascus, at which time they also undertook to try and establish a lasting peace throughout Islam.

The provisions for the withdrawal of troops so grieved Ashtar that he refused to act as a witness to the document, saying, "Never again could I acknowledge my own right hand if it did but touch such a foul scrap of parchment." Ali left the battlefield with a heavy heart, for he could see that Mu'awiya was the only person who would derive any benefit from the truce. He was further tormented by the thought that Mu'awiya had only been playing for time and that the arbitration held out no real hopes of a lasting and permanent peace

for Islam. Victory, and with it peace, had been within his grasp but the treachery of the Iraqi soldiery and of his own trusted officers had snatched it from him. The future of Islam looked cloudy still.

### **Discontent at Kufa**

Back in Kufa Ali found a people mourning its dead. There was hardly a house that did not behold a woman weeping in it, so great had been the carnage. Worse still for Ali, the Kufans began to demand revenge against the Syrians for their fallen martyrs. Ali could not renew the war, for he had pledged faith to the treaty and once again he found people turning against him while he stood steadfastly by a promise he had made, albeit a promise made under duress.

Meanwhile the weary days dragged on until the date of the pronouncement of the arbitration. Ali seems to have been a broken man, sunk in melancholy apathy and content to remain a passive, even apprehensive, spectator of the events that followed.

### **The Farce of the Arbitration**

Divergent<sup>1</sup> accounts regarding the time and place of the arbitration court have come down to us. The widely accepted view is that in the beginning of 658 A.D. the Umpires met at Duma-tu'l-Jandal, situated midway between Kufa and Syria, where Mu'awiya's arbiter, Amr bin As, came with a retinue of 400 horse. Here he met Ali's Umpire Abu Musa. Ali had also sent his cousin, Abdullah bin Abbas, who was accom-

1. Abu Mikhnaf does not mention the name of the place where the court of Arbitration was to meet. He simply says that it was to be held between Kufa and Damascus. Waqidi, Zuhri, and Abu Ma'ashar mention the names of Duma and Adhruh simultaneously. It was decided that the judges should meet in Duma, and if owing to any exigencies their progress in decision was retarded, they might meet the following year in Adhruh. As they did not meet at Adhruh, it must be taken for granted that the meeting place of the Umpires was at Duma. With regard to dates, according to Wadidi and Zuhri, the Arbitration court was held in Shaban 38 A.H., while others hold that it was held in 37 A.H. Tabiri and Ibn Athir hold that the arbiters met at Adhruh and not at Duma-tu'l-Jandal.

panied by Shuraih bin Haui at the head of 400 horse. Thither had also flocked the son of the late Caliph Umar, Ibn Zubair, Saad bin Waqas, Mughira bin Shuba, Abdur Rahman bin Harith and a large crowd of men from Syria, Iraq, Mecca and Medina, anxiously waiting to hear the judgment. Some of the leading chiefs of the Quraish had also gathered there, in the hope that they might be selected for office.

Amr bin As opened the discussion with the Quranic verse:—

“And do not kill any one whom God has forbidden except for a just cause, and whosoever is slain unjustly, We have indeed given to his heir authority, so let him not exceed the just limits in slaying, for he is aided.” (Qur'an 17:33)

On this verse he rested his case for Mu'awiya, but Abu Musa was not convinced by Amr's argument. The Umpires then withdrew for an informal private conference during which Abu Musa is said to have admitted that the murder of Uthman had been “Sinful” and “Spiteful”. When Amr replied “If it was a vicious deed why not appoint Mu'awiya as the avenger of Uthman's blood and his rightful successor?” Abu Musa still did not consider his opponents argument a valid one. Quickly he retorted, “If the question of succession is to be decided by kinship alone, why not appoint a son of the late Caliph Uthman? If this is a question of the succession to the Caliphate, it should be determined by the Believers-in-Faith, and especially by the “Majlis-i-Shura” (Council of the Elders). Abu Musa considered Abdullah, the son of the late Caliph Umar to be the fittest person for nomination as the new Caliph, while Amr bin As extolled the virtues of his own son who according to him, was the best and most suitable of all the candidates who might aspire to the sovereignty. “An upright man” said Abu Musa, “but one who in this struggle has already identified himself with Mu'awiya's side, and we should not kindle mutin-

amongst the Muslims.” On similar grounds of partisanship Abdullah son of Zubair and many other possible candidates were all considered unfit. With the list exhausted, Amr bin As said “Well Abu Musa.” If there is none good to fill this office, what judgment will you deliver? “My judgment will be” said Abu Musa, “that both Ali and Mu’awiya should be set aside, and the freedom of electing the Caliph be given to the people or Majilis-i-Shura”. It is this council which can elect any one it thinks fit. Amr bin As jumped up and said, “Verily your judgment coincides with mine. Let us go forth and announce this decision.”

It should be noted that in coming to such a judgment, the Umpires did not quote any authority of the Qur’an or Sunnah to justify deposing Ali or ousting Mu’awiya, and that they had not held to the terms of the Arbitration—Deed which had required them to choose either the one man or the other.

### **The Deception during the Pronouncement**

Hundreds of thousands of people had crowded round the pavilion where they were waiting impatiently to hear the judgment. In spite of Ibn Abbas’s warnings to Abu Musa not to be first in everything, as was his wont, it was he who spoke<sup>1</sup> first before the Corona, declaring, “Let all of you know we have come to an agreement. We have concurred on a decision which we trust will check the schismatic tendencies of Islam, and reunite the people of the Islamic Commonwealth.” “Verily Abu Musa speaks the truth” said Amr bin As. I will now request him to step forward and pronounce

1. According to Masudi, Amr bin As and Abu Musa jointly agreed to put in black and white the decision that they had to pronounce. The deed of judgment duly recorded emphasised that both the umpires had agreed with each other and that after the Holy Prophet, Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman were the lawful successors of God’s Apostle and that in view of the disruptive tendencies which had crept into the ranks of Islam, it was desirable that both Mu’awiya and Ali should be deposed. Other historians do not mention any such written deed and hold that they came to agreement by verbal discussion, and Abu Musa was the first to ascend the pulpit and pronounce his decision.

his judgment." At this Abu Musa advanced and in a low and clear voice said, "O ye people! We have well deliberated and considered the matter. There is no other way to bring about concord and peace in the ranks of Islam except to depose Ali and Mu'awiya, and then leave the choice of election to the "Ummah" or nation. This is my judgment. Then laying down his sword Abu Musa continued, "Even thus do I depose Ali, as I have laid low the weapon which I held in my hand."

After this fatal pronouncement by Abu Musa, Amr bin As advanced and said, "Ye people! You have heard the judgment of my co-arbiter. He has deposed his chief, Ali. I confirm this deposition. I call you to witness that I confirm Mu'awiya in the office of the Caliph, since he, as the avenger of Uthman's blood, is entitled to the succession: even as I make fast this sword." Amr bin As, suiting the action to the words, put back his sword into his sheath.

The effrontery of this action staggered the mob. Not even the Syrians believed that Abu Musa would allow himself to be so scandalously duped. The people waited in silence holding their breath, to see what would happen next.

A disorderly scene ensued in which Abu Musa cursed Amr, while Amr jeered at his simplicity. Bewildered, Abu Musa said to Ali's cousin Ibn Abbas, "What could I do, it was not my fault, Amr bin As acquiesced in my decision in private and then tricked me in public. To which Ibn Abbas replied, "None of your fault? Verily it was the fault of those who put you in office. Abu Musa ashamed of his conduct of the affair and fearing for his life escaped to Mecca.

Meanwhile the Syrians hailed the trick played by Amr bin As as a great diplomatic triumph. Amr bin As himself was seized by some of the Iraqi soldiers and handled roughly. They had not fought the bitter battle of Siffin to see their glory dimmed by a vile trick. Amr bin As managed to escape, however, back to Syria

where he again proclaimed Mu'awiya the undisputed Caliph.

Broken-hearted Ibn Abbas returned to Ali with the sad news, whereupon Ali, who refused to accept the fraudulent decision of the Umpires instituted a solemn anathematisation of both Mu'awiya and Amr bin As, together with all their followers, in the five daily prayers. These curses were to be broadcast from all the mosques throughout his empire. Back in Syria, Mu'awiya was similarly cursing Ali from the Syrian mosques with curses that extended to Ali's son, Hasan and Hussain and to his general, Malik Ashtar.

This mutual solemn excommunication and denunciation of each other in the mosques, where they had harangued the people, became theregular practice for a very long time. "The patriarchal epoch of Islam, says Von Kremer, "(thus) ended in streams of bloodshed in the war between the Umayyads who gathered round Mu'awiya and the supporters of the old order of things, the party of Medina which had unsheathed their swords for Ali." Thus from the very day of the pronouncement of the fatal judgment of the Umpires, the Islamic world was divided into two rival camps under two antagonistic Caliphs, who uttered calumnies against one another in the daily prayers from the pulpits of the mosques.

### **The Results of the Arbitration**

As a result of the treacherous ruse of the arbitration, Mu'awiya regained the Caliphate. Indeed he had nothing to lose for he had not been elected Caliph as Ali had been. The decision to depose Ali, on the other hand, considerably weakened his position. Even if Abu Musa's proposal to refer the matter to a Council of Elders had gone through, Ali's position would still have been unable to sustain a great weight. Ali had everything to lose by submitting to arbitration; while Mu'awiya had everything to gain.

The results of the struggle for supremacy between the two rivals were far-reaching. The Battle of Siffin, with its outcome of the Arbitration, changed the entire course of Islamic history. A hereditary monarchy was to be set up confined to one house, and that house's notoriety in hostility to the Hashamites was an open secret. The schismatic tendencies in Islam were hence forward to be inextricably woven with Islamic history.

### **The Partiality of the Historians**

Unfortunately there are no Syrian records of the Arbitration and the events which led up to it. Those accounts which are in existence are Iraqi in origin and unreservedly unsympathetic to Mu'awiya and the Syrians. Calumnies are heaped on Mu'awiya, Amr bin As and the hapless Abu Musa, while certain actions of Ali and his partisans, that do not altogether redound to his credit, are conveniently glossed over. Professor P.K. Hitti,<sup>1</sup> attempts to come to a more objective assessment of the events connected with the Arbitration:—

"The current tradition is that the two Umpires agreed to depose both principals, thus clearing the way for a "Dark horse", but after the elder of the two, Abu Musa, had stood up and declared the Caliphate of his master null and void, Amr betrayed his colleague and confirmed Mu'awiya. But the critical studies of Père Lammens, preceded by those of Wellhausen tend to show that this tradition reflects the view of the Iraqi school to which most of our extant sources belong—which flourished under the Abbasides—the Umayyad's mortal enemies. What probably happened was that both referees deposed both principals, which left Ali the loser. Mu'awiya had no caliphate to be deposed from. He was but a governor of a province. The very fact of the arbitration itself had raised him to a level equivalent to a mere pretender. The sentence of the

1. P.K. Hitti. *History of the Arabs*. p. 181. Publishers Macmillan & Co., 1949.

judges deprived Ali of a real office, and Mu'awiya of a fictitious claim which he had not yet dared publicly to assert. Not until 661 two years after the curtain had been lowered on the arbitration farce, did Mu'awiya proclaim himself Caliph at Jerusalem.

Wellhausen,<sup>1</sup> another Western historian says:—

An account of the Syrian side has not been preserved to us. It would make different reading from that of Abu Mikhnaf, though it would scarcely be more creditable, as we see from Theophanes, A.M. 6148: "Mu'awiya's side gained the mastery and took possession of the water; Ali's men deserted because of thirst; still Mu'awiya did not wish to fight but won the victory easily. "Of course Abu Mikhnaf sides with the Iraqites and Ali against the Syrians and Mu'awiya. Ali had the better cause and the more pious followers. The fact that his own brother, Aqil, fought against him is passed over in silence, but there is no concealment of the fact that the Syrians<sup>2</sup> had sons of the Caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar on their side besides 4000 Readers (of the Qur'an); thus the pious were not solely on the side of Ali. The followers of Mu'awiya were just as convinced of the justice of their cause as the Iraqites. The latter, indeed, were by no means all firmly convinced of the right of Ali, but kept asking each other for proofs and held discussions amongst themselves and with their opponents—discussions which continued long after Siffin and were interminable. They were not eager for the struggle with their brothers in faith and race, and appeared quite willing to put a stop to it. The party opposition was weak to begin with, and only gained strength later on."

The rest of Ali's story is played out against this background of party struggle. It is a story of ever-increasing bitterness between factions which had been none of his making and which were to lead to his untimely end.

1. J. Wellhausen. *The Arab kingdom and its fall*. Translation by Margaret Graham. University of Calcutta. Ed. 1927. p. 82.

2. Bukhari (Ed. Bulaq 1289) 2-67 F. 139, 145, 3 ii.  
Deutsche Morgenl Ztschr. (D.M.Z.) 1884, 93.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE REBELLION OF THE KHWARIJ  
(KHARAJITES)**The Separatists**

Ali's decision to submit to Arbitration did not meet with the approval of his Iraqi soldiery, about 12,000 of whom deserted and rebelled against him on the march back to Kufa. These were the warriors who had compelled him to cease hostilities, in the hour of victory and who now felt cheated by the Syrian trick of Arbitration from the rightful fruits of victory.

The Khwarij, as they came to be called, were also opposed, on principle, to arbitration by Man, holding that God alone could decide the issue of Caliphate and that Ali had sinned against God in signing the Arbitration-Deed.

**Connotation of Khawarij**

The name of Khariji, plural Khawarij, has been variously held to mean, "Seceder" or "Outgoer." Professor<sup>1</sup> Nicholson says of it, "It has been suggested that the name of Khariji (plural Khawarij) refers to a passage in the Qur'an (4:101) where mention is made of "those who go forth (Yakhruj) from their homes as emigrants (Muhajir) to God and His Messenger"; so that "Kharajite" means 'One who leaves his home among the unbelievers for God's sake', and corresponds to the

1. R.A. Nicholson. *A literary history of the Arabs*. Cambridge University Press. Ed. 1953. p. 209.

term Muhajir which was applied to the Meccan converts who accompanied the Prophet in his migration to Medina. Another name by which they often designated themselves is likewise Qur'anic in origin, viz. Shurat (plural of Shar): literary "Sellers"—that is to say those who sell their lives and goods in return for paradise. The Kharajites were mostly drawn from the Bedouine soldiery who settled in Busra and Kufa after the Persian Wars."

They also came to be known as "Harurites" from the place where they were first encamped.

At the outset the Kharajites seem to have been fanatically zealous Muslim but their decision to desert Ali did not stem solely from religious convictions. As Bedouine they were essentially a democratic people who witnessed the struggle between Ali and Mu'awiya as a game of King-making in which they were no longer willing to be pawns. "Should the Syrians win", said one of them we will be ground to pieces. What will be our fate if men like Uthman and his stock rule over us? It is they who will seize the fruits of our victory won by our sword and make it appear as if it was theirs by inheritance. Are we not losing this world and the next?"

Again another murmured, "The Umpires will simply decide between Mu'awiya and Ali. What will be our lot? Will it not be the imposition of a despotic rule with the greatest rigour? Will not the winner live on the fat of land, and make us his obedient slaves?"

Whoever was victorious, Umayyad or Hashmites, it seemed to these fierce Bedouine warriors that it would be a victory for the Quraish aristocracy at the expense of the democratic tribesmen. Seething with unrest, some 12,000 of them deserted Ali and encamped at Harura, taking as their watch-word "La Hukma Illa Lillahi" or "The decision of God, the word of God alone," a phrase which, ever since it was first coined, has become a favourite with Public agitators, affording as it does a convenient cloak for their own less worthy designs.

The original "Separatists" had three great leaders,

namely Shabath bin Ribī al-Riahi, Abdullah bin Kauwa al-Yeshkuri and Yezid bin Qais al-Arhabī from the three famous tribes of the Banu Temim, the Banu Bakr and Banu Hamadan. They proposed to have no Caliphs, but to vest the administration in a "Council of the pious".

### **Ali Negotiates with the Kharajites**

Anxious to prevent another outbreak of fighting, Ali deputed his cousin Ibn Abbas to try and negotiate a compromise. When these efforts failed, Ali went in person to discuss the Kharajite grievances with their chiefs. The Kharajites insisted that Ali should march forthwith against Mu'awiya, a demand with which Ali could not possibly comply, as he had given his word to abide by the decision of the Umpires. After much argument, he succeeded in convincing the chiefs that he would be sinning if he committed a breach of faith and that, should they attempt to persuade him to go against the arbitration—Deed his sin would be laid at their door and their honour would likewise be tarnished. They must, in all fairness, wait for the Decision of the Umpires who had promised to give their verdict according to the Qur'an which was, as the Kharajites required, Decision by the word of God."

Ali promised, however, that if the Umpires broke faith and failed to abide by the Qur'an when coming to a decision, he would publicly repudiate their verdict and once more take the field against the Syrians.

With this assurance, together with many promises of secular and material rewards, Ali managed to persuade the rebels to break camp and return to their homes until after the decision of the Umpires.

Months later, when Ali having publicly repudiated the Umpires, sought to raise an army against the Syrians, he expected the Kharajites to flock to his standard but they made no attempt to join him. In a letter to their leader he wrote: "It is high time that you should return

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to join my army. We are resuming hostilities against the common enemy, yours and ours. We are returning to the point where you backed up our side in the field of Siffin. Now come and follow it up to the finish. The Kharajites sent an insolent reply, saying "we look upon you as an apostate, detested by the Lord. Should you make a public confession of your heresy, and repent, we can consider whether anything could be arranged between us. Failing this, you may treat the matter as closed."

Repeated attempts on Ali's part to urge the Kharajites to join with him against the Syrians met with total failure. Instead they decided to raise their own independent standard and went into camp at Naharwan, under the leadership of Abdullah bin Wahab al-Rasibi.

**The Kharajites at Naharwan**

Naharwan was a township, situated on a canal of the same name, a few miles East of the Tigris near Madian and between Bagdad and Wasit. Here the Kharajites made extensive preparations for war. Recruited mostly from Bedouine tribesmen, these "Democrats" preached equality in the most vehement terms, tolerating no other views but their own. Highly indignant at the self-aggrandisement of the Quraish, who did not trouble to disguise their depravity and immorality, the Kharajites set themselves up as Soldier-theologians, the Co-venters of Islam. Any oath of allegiance, they argued heatedly, was sinful, whether to Ali or to Mu'awiya, for their obedience was due to God and to God alone. "Both sides" they said, "are running a race of apostasy: the Syrians, whether right or wrong, run after Mu'awiya and we back up Ali. What is all this? Nothing but heinous blasphemy." To Ali's arguments that arbitration had been forced upon him by them, and them alone, they replied, "Varily we are sorry at what has happened. But as we have repented and gone back, Ali must do the same, or else we will fight with him and if slain in the

battle we shall gladly meet our God. Ali's displeasure on the Umpire's judgment is due to selfish reasons, and not for God's cause."

According to Shahrastani some 4,000 of the Kharajites had vowed to give over their lives entirely to God. These were men of "Ahl-i-Siyam wa-Salat" (men of prayers and fasting) who were full of pious zeal. There was a strong element of fanaticism amongst the followers of al-Rabasi and with it went a fierce intolerance of opinions other than their own. The Kharajites began to propagate their doctrines by the sword and many rumours of atrocities began to reach Ali.

Naharwan rapidly became a rendezvous for the disaffected who flocked to the Kharajite camp from Kufa and Busra and the outlying parts of Ali's Empire so that to the hard core of zealous was also added a miscellaneous rabble of malcontents.

### **Kharajite Atrocities**

Meanwhile Ali had managed to muster an army for a renewed campaign against Mu'awiya. With difficulty he had conscripted some 65,000 "Volunteers" of which 8,000 were slaves and some 17,000 young boys in their teens, and he was on his way towards Syria when news of the latest outrages by the Kharajite fanatics reached him. They had murdered Abdullah bin Khabbab, the son of the oldest adherent of the Holy Prophet, cutting him down in cold blood, along with his wife and children, merely because his religious views did not tally with theirs. Three women of the tribe of Tayy had also been put to death in a similarly cruel manner, and numerous atrocities had been committed on travellers passing through their territory. Pregnant women had been ripped up with the sword and the aged and weak cruelly tortured to death.

Ali's soldiers demanded reparation for these atrocities saying that they could not follow Ali further towards Syria if their families were to be left at the mercy of the

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Kharajite outlaws. "How can you permit such lawlessness to go unchecked" they argued, urging Ali to lead a punitive expedition against them.

**Ali Attempts to Win Over the Kharajites a Second Time**

Arriving near Naharwan, Ali followed his usual method of first exploring the possibilities of a peaceful settlement before committing his forces to battle. On this occasion he did not make camp but planted a standard in the earth. On this he hoisted an inscription which said that all those who came under it should have amnesty and safe conduct and that all who returned to Kufa would find sanctuary there. A free amnesty was promised to all those who repented, and this was announced by the beat of drums, to the enemy camp.

Ali's next step was to despatch a messenger to the Kharajites demanding the surrender of those guilty of the murder of Abdullah. The messenger added, "Should you hand over those who are guilty, we shall leave you alone until God gives us victory over Mu'awiya in Syria, and then perhaps the Lord may turn your hearts towards us. "To this the Kharajite leader replied, "Go forth and tell your Caliph that we are all equally guilty of the various murders that we have committed, and that the blood of those heretics who were slain by us has been shed lawfully." Most of the rebel troops however were afraid of Ali's army, and 500 of them are said to have taken refuge in a neighbouring Persian town, while many more went back to their homes. Some 100 Kharajites are said to have gone over to Ali, which left out of an army of 4,000 only some 1800. Their leader Abdullah al-Rasibi nevertheless resolved to fight to a finish.

**The Battle of Naharwan<sup>1</sup>**

In December 658, Ali marshalled his forces and led

1. Divergent accounts of this battle have come down to us. According to Baladhuri it took place on 9 Safar 37 A.H. (17 July 658 A.D.). Abu Mikhnaf

the final assault against the Kharajites in the memorable battle of Naharwan. With the battle cry of 'On to Paradise' the Kharajites rushed on Ali's troops, only to be completely annihilated. All save nine of Abdullah's men were slain and he himself also perished. On Ali's side the casualties were insignificant. "A little before this fight" says Simon<sup>1</sup> Ockley, "Ali had foretold to his friends what would be the event. "You see" says he, "these people who make profession of reading the Qur'an, without observing its commandments, will quit the profession which they make of their sect, as quick as arrows fly from the bow when they are shot off."

### **The effects of the victory**

Ali's victory over the Kharajites was devoid of any permanent results. Although the Caliph had won a decisive battle, yet it remained a hollow victory. "It had been better" says Sir William<sup>2</sup> Muir, "for the peace of Islam if not one of the 4,000 had escaped. The snake was scotched, not killed, the fanatic spirit was strangely catching; and the theocratic cause continued to be canvassed vigorously and unceasingly, though in secret, both at al-Basra and al-Kufa. However hopeless their object, the fanatics were nerved, if not by expectation of divine aid, at least by the sure hope of the martyr's crown. In the following year, bands of insurgent fanatics once again appeared unexpectedly in the field denouncing Ali; and proclaiming that the kingdom of the

places this event in the last months of 37 A.H. (December 658) whereas Waqidi puts it in Shaban 38 A.H. Thus it cannot be ascertained with accuracy whether this battle was fought before the pronouncement of arbitration or after it. The widely popular view places it after the pronouncement of judgment by the Umpires. It is probable that it might have been fought simultaneously with the arbitration. If Waqidi is to be believed the arbitration took place in January 659 and there is a whole year between the battle of Siffin and the execution of arbitration. If such was the case then Zuhri's version that the time limit of arbitration was extended might be taken as true.

1. Simon Ockley. *History of the Saracens*. p. 326. Publishers Alex. Murray & Sons, London. Ed. 1870.

2. Sir William Muir. *The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline, and Fall*. p. 275. Publishers John Grant, Edinburgh. Ed. 1924.

Lord was at hand. One after another they were cut to pieces, or put to flight with ease. Still such continual risings could not but endamage the name and power of Ali, who now reaped the fruit of his weak compromise with the enemies of Uthman, in neglecting to bring them to justice. Fanatics in their extravagant doctrine, these men were too sincere to combine with any purely political sect, and hence they seldom came near to leaving any permanent mark of their creed behind them. But both in the present and succeeding reigns, we find them every now and then gathering up their strength dangerously to assail the Empire, and as often beaten back. Ever and anon, for ages, these Khawarij "went forth" (as the name implies) on their desperate errand, a thorn in the side of the Caliphate, and a terror to the well-disposed."

### **Later Political Theories of the Kharajites**

With the advance of time, the Kharajites began to formulate and develop political theories about the State and Sovereignty which led, ultimately, to a separate creed. Their wild and unruly Bedouine temperament remained, however, untamed by theorisation and they continued to hate the Quraish aristocracy. Professor Nicholson<sup>2</sup> says of them; "Civil life wrought little change in their unruly temper. Far from acknowledging the peculiar sanctity of a Qurashite, they desired a chief of their own blood whom they might obey, in Bedouine fashion, as long as he did not abuse or exceed the powers conferred upon him. The mainspring of the movement, however, was pietistic, and can be traced, as Wellhausen has shown, to the Qur'anic-Readers, who made it a matter of conscience that Ali should avow his contrition for the fatal error which their own temporary and deeply regretted infatuation had forced him to commit. They cast off Ali for the same reason which

2. R.A. Nicholson. *A literary history of the Arabs*. Cambridge University Press. Ed. 1933. p. 209.

led them to strike at Uthman: in both cases they were maintaining the cause of God against an unjust Caliph. It is important to remember these facts in view the of cardinal Kharajite doctrines (1) that every free Arab was eligible as Caliph, and (2) that an evil-doing Caliph must be deposed and, if necessary put to death. Mustawrid bin 'Ullifa, the Kharajite "Commander of the Faithful" wrote to Simak bin 'Ubayd, the governor of Ctesiphon as follows: "We call you to the Book of Almighty God, and to the Sunnah (custom) of the Holy Prophet-on whom be peace! and to the administration of Abu Bakr and Umar-may God be pleased with them: and to renounce Uthman and Ali because they corrupted the true religion and abandoned the authority of the Divine Book."

The historian<sup>1</sup> Dozy, comes out even more strongly in favour of the early Kharajites. "The Kharajites" says he, "were noble and ardent souls, who in a self-seeking age, preserved their religious purity, whose hearts were not set upon earthly things, and who had too lofty an idea of God to do him mere lip-service and to drowse in conventional and sluggish piety. These Puritans of Islam who were famous for their austerity, lived their lives according to the precepts of Qur'an, revelled in heroic deeds of the triumph of Faith, suffered persecutions and attained martyrdom. The fear of hell weighed heavily on their minds and in their zeal for righteousness, a single false step taken by a follower involved excommunication from the fold. If any follower had committed a bigger sin (Kabira), he was held to have damned himself in the everlasting hell fire. In their craze for reforms they denounced all worldly enjoyments, games, poetry and songs. Foppish display of the pomp of this life and secular power were held in great disgust. They looked for heavenly interposition for the establishment of their theocratic rule. Even if they fell fighting in a battle, their martyrs were sure to go to heaven. They must fight against the wicked world,

1. Reinhart Dozy. *Spanish Islam*. p.79.

and try to become the inheritor of the next world. We are told how some of these fanatics would not eat a date which they had picked up on the road-side because they had not paid for it and of others who having killed a chicken or a rabbit would not go back unless they had compensated its owner. They laid the greatest stress on equality and fraternity. In the tribal civil war, when every tribe plunged itself into it and asserted its nobility, the Kharajite stuck to the beautiful equity as preached by Islam for, said they, "All Muslims are brothers. Do not stress whether you are from Banu Qais or from Temim. We are all brethren in Islam, we worship the Unity of God The Almighty who is best pleased with him who best shows his gratitude. "Every true Muslim in their eyes was eligible for the Caliphate, irrespective of his social status, provided he had the merit. In their love of liberty they maintained that the Caliph's appointment was necessary for uprooting vices and handling evil-doers but that true believers in faith, being people of virtue, could easily dispense with this office."

### **A Popular Fallacy**

It is a popular fallacy to regard Khawarajism as an off-shoot of Sunnism. As a matter of fact it came into existence long before the establishment of the Sunni School and, although it has many features in common with the tenets of the Sunnis, it has certain other characteristics peculiarly its own. Professor<sup>1</sup> Nicholson, making a true assessment of Khwarajism, goes on to say, "Basically Khwarajism was a re-assertion of the old Islamic doctrine of equality and fraternity which had never been fully realised and was now irretrievably ruined. Theoretically, all devout Muslims shared in the desire for its restoration and condemned the existing government no less cordially than the Kharajites. What distinguished the latter party was the remorseless severity

1. R.A. Nicholson. *A literary history of the Arabs*. p. 209.

with which they carried their principles into action. To them it was absolutely vital that the Imam or head of the community, should rule in the name and according to the will of God: those who followed any other way sealed their doom in the next world: eternal salvation hung upon the choice of a successor to the Prophet. Muslims who refused to execrate Uthman and Ali were the worst of infidels; it was the duty of every true believer to take part in the holy war against such, and to kill them, together with their wives and children. These atrocities recoiled upon the insurgents, who soon found themselves in danger of extermination. Milder counsels began to prevail. Thus the Ibadites (followers of Abdullah bin Abad) held it lawful to live amongst the Muslims and mix with them on terms of mutual tolerance. But compromise was in truth incompatible with the *RAISON D'ETRE* of the Kharajites, namely to establish the kingdom of God upon earth. This meant virtual anarchy "Their unbending logic shattered every constitution which it set up. As Ali remarked, "They say, 'No government' (la Imara), but there must be a government, good or bad". Nevertheless, it was a noble ideal for which they fought in pure devotion, having, unlike the other political parties, no worldly interests to serve."

It is sad indeed to reflect that people of good intentions with noble ideals frequently do a good deal of harm in the world and that truths which may have their origin in the simplest acts of piety can become the excuse for terrorising those who do not acknowledge them. The Kharajites sincerely lamented the passing of the days of Islamic unity yet contributed largely to the ever-increasing schisms which rent it asunder. Ali too had dreamed of restoring the old unity of Islam but he was in his simple-hearted way, no match for the devious and cunning advisers with whom he was surrounded. He abhorred violence yet through his weak conciliatory policy of compromise with the murderers of Uthman, he entangled himself in warfare and disharmony which he most sought to prevent.

## CHAPTER XVII

THE DECLINE OF ALI AND THE  
LOSS OF EGYPT**Ali Puts a New Heart**

Perhaps the most important result of the victory over the Kharajites was that it put new heart into Ali. The defection of the Iraqis after Siffin must have struck a greivous blow at his self-confidence, but now Nahrwan gave him new heart. He began to feel that Mu'awiya might still be forced into submission and resolved to push on into Syria immediately, while his troops were still elated by victory. Once again his hopes were to be betrayed.

**Failure of the Syrian campaign**

Before continuing the march into Syria, Ali's troops demanded a period of rest and refreshment. To this Ali readily consented. They marched back to Kufa, pitching camp at Nakileh and here, by proclamation Ali told his soldiers they could all have one day's leave of absence so that they put their personal affairs in order. The troops began dispersing in small parties, but failed to return. With the camp almost empty, Ali was forced to return to Kufa and exhort the people from the pulpit to re-enlist. This plea fell on deaf ears for, by this time, the Kufans, who had never been enthusiastic about a Syrian campaign, had become so accustomed to hearing his exhortations and reproaches that they took no notice of them. In spite of the victory at Nahrwan,

Ali's personal prestige seems never to have been lower and the Kufans did not lift a finger to help him. Once again Ali was baulked of victory over Mu'awiya when it had seemed to be certainty and the scheme for a Syrian expedition had to be abandoned.

These were days of deep distress for Ali, who felt he could no longer count on the support of any of his former adherents. Only Ashtar, in camp at Nisibis on the Mesopotamian border, remained unswervingly loyal to him.

### **Rebellion in Egypt**

Even if Ali had been able to muster enough troops for a Syrian expedition, it is doubtful that they would ever have marched to the Syrian border, for the cunning Mu'awiya had already planned a strong diversionary measure. News now reached Ali that Amr bin As was moving into Egypt at the head of 6,000 horse.

According to Abu Miknaf, Mu'awiya had already had his eyes on Egypt at the time of the Decision of the Umpires. Other sources refer to his having talked at an even date, of conquering Egypt, promising it to Amr bin As at the time when Amr had first publicly acknowledged Mu'awiya as Caliph; and again when the strategem of the Qur'an on the lances was proposed. Now as Amr set off for Egypt Mu'awiya is alleged to have said to his wily friend, "O Amr! You were the first to conquer Egypt in the reign of Umar the Great, and now you should be the first to redeem it by your second conquest.

### **The Alid administration of Egypt**

We have seen in Chapter XII how Mu'awiya by his assiduous propaganda had succeeded in stirring up discord between Ali and his newly appointed governor Qais bin Sa'd in Egypt. Ali had instructed Qais to follow an aggressive policy against the Egyptian malcontents, but Qais realising how impolitic the adoption

of such a course was which was sure to jeopardise the peace of the country refused to abide by the Caliph's order. This had resulted in the dismissal of Qais and when he left Egypt, it appeared that all moderation, statesmanship, and wisdom went away with him. Ali then appointed Muhammad bin Abu Bakr as the governor of Egypt. Muhammad who was the son of late Caliph Abu Bakr was a rash youngman, who implemented an aggressive policy towards the Egyptian rebels.

### **Mu'awiya's propaganda in Egypt**

The ground in Egypt had certainly been prepared well in advance by Mu'awiya's propaganda. Ever since the murder of Uthman, Mu'awiya's agents had been unceasing in their propaganda and Ali's own governor Muhammad bin Abu Bakr, with his ill-advised policy of "Blood and Iron", had played into the hands of his enemy by alienating the sympathies of even the most staunch supporters of the Alid cause. No sooner had Amr bin As set foot on Egyptian soil than all the malcontents gathered round him.

The head of the Uthmanid party at this time was Mu'awiya bin Hudaij as-Sakuni, with whom Mu'awiya of Syria had long been in secret correspondence. Amr bin As could also count on the support of Maslama bin Mukhallad with whom his master had also concluded an offensive and defensive alliance.

Realising, too late, how ill his cause had been served by Muhammad bin Abu Bakr, Ali now sent hasty orders to Ashtar,<sup>1</sup> in Mesopotamia, appointing him the new governor and urging him to move down into Egypt immediately, in the hope that he might undo the harm wrought by his hot-headed predecessor.

1. According to Kabi, Ashtar was sent to Egypt after the fall of Muhammad bin Abu Bakr in the final battle that the later fought against the Egyptians—an account which could hardly be relied upon. With the fall of Muhammad bin Abu Bakr the fate of Egypt was sealed for Ali, and events forebode that Ali affected Ashtar's appointment to make the last bid to save the Caliphate.

**Ashtar is poisoned**

Ashtar, who had been a ring-leader of the regicides in the murder of Uthman, was one of the best generals of his time who had made quite a name in Kufa and had brought Mu'awiya and Amr bin As to the verge of defeat at Siffin. Mu'awiya knew full well what Ashtar's appointment meant and was in no way anxious to meet up with him again. Mu'awiya consequently bribed the Chief of Qulzum in whose house Ashtar would almost certainly stay on the way to Egypt, to poison the general. So Ali lost the last and most staunch of all his supporters. Ashtar, the most able of his soldiers died, not on the battlefield, but at the table of a man whose loyalty had been bought by Mu'awiya and who had poisoned the honey which he offered his guest.

**The Defeat and Death of Muhammad, Son of Abu Bakr**

Accounts differ in detail about Ali's conduct of the Egyptian campaign but the most widely accepted version is that Ali now had no alternative but to ask Muhammad bin Abu Bakr to continue in the office and to hang on as best he could. Some chroniclers say that Ali was able to send 2,000 crack troops, under the command of the notorious Tujibite Kinana, thought by many to have been the actual murderer of the Caliph Uthman, by way of reinforcement. Other authorities maintain that once again, the Kufans would do nothing to help Ali and that, after fifty days of haranging them from the pulpit, Ali still had managed to muster only 2,000 volunteers. These he is said to have sent to Egypt but the long delay had already proved fatal. Hardly had they left Kufa when the news came of the total defeat of Muhammad's forces and his ugly death. Having fled from the battlefield, Muhammad took shelter in some near-by ruins where he was discovered by Mu'awiya bin Hudaij, dragged out and slain. His corpse was

wrapped in an ass's skin and burned.

The ignominious end of Muhammad bin Abu Bakr sealed the fate of Egypt for Ali. Mu'awiya appointed Amr bin As as his lieutenant to rule it in his name and the newly-conquered country, with its immense rich resources became incorporated in the Syrian Empire.

### **The effect of the loss of Egypt on Ali**

Far more damaging to Ali than even the loss of his Egyptian resources, was the blow which had been struck at his prestige. In one of his sermons to the Kufans he summed up the loss in these words:—

O ye people ! In the hour of need you have kept aloof from me, like a restive camel when it casts its burden. Lo and behold! The son of Abu Bakr falls, and with him—Egypt too". The harangue fell on deaf ears for Ali, who had long since lost the affection of the Kufans, could now no longer count on their loyalty. His soldiers were deserting in large numbers, while the ordinary people, who had lost relatives in Ali's wars and who had borne the brunt of the heavy casualties which his armies had suffered, were seething with bitterness and discontent. Anarchy was rife and it seemed that the slightest flare-up of fighting, in such an inflammable situation, might well provide the flame which would blow up the whole edifice of the Caliphate.

Day after day Ali ascended his pulpit and poured out quotations from the Qur'an and the Sunnah in a last eloquent attempt to re-kindle the enthusiasm of the people. But the people were too overwhelmed by the calamities that beset them on all sides to pay much heed to the word of God, still less to listen to the words of the pathetic, broken-down figure whom they loved little. Ali now lost heart completely; despair overwhelmed him, crippling his energies and paralysing all initiative. He completely lost faith in human nature and withdrew to a life of retirement. He no longer had any control over the army or over the people and

presented the sad spectacle of a beaten man.

### **Mu'awiya's Star in the Ascendant**

As Ali's star set, Mu'awiya began to rise in the Islamic firmament. Ali's pitiable plight after the loss of Egypt left Mu'awiya virtually a free hand. In the words of Wellhausen<sup>1</sup> "This left Mu'awiya's hand free. He at once made himself secure from the Romans by purchasing a truce from Constantine at the price of a yearly tribute. Arab traditions only mention this incidentally. We learn from Theophanes that it took place in A.M. 6150 (sel. 969-A.H. 38-39). But Mu'awiya did not risk an organised attack upon Ali, he contented himself with harassing him here and there. . . .

By the end of the year 658 A.D. and the beginning of 659, we find Mu'awiya well-established at Syria with a disputable but a plausible title, growing strong in the affection of his subjects, and augmenting his resource whereas Ali, whose power was waning everyday, was losing the affection of his subjects and the fidelity of his soldiers."

### **Trouble in Busra**

Alarmed by the news of Ali's depressive state of mind, his cousin Abdullah ibn Abbas, the governor of Busra, set out for Kufa, hoping to rally Ali's spirit or at least to make sure that he did not attempt to abdicate or commit any rash act. Mu'awiya immediately took advantage of Ibn Abbas's absence from Busra to send an expedition of 2,000 horse, under the command of Ibn Hadrami, to take that city by surprise.<sup>2</sup> The

1. J Wellhausen. *The Arab kingdom and its fall*. Translation by Miss Weir. p. 99 University of Calcutta, 1927.

2. Another Basarite account says that Mu'awiya sent his emissaries with a letter to the Basarites in which he asked them to rise against Ali. Mu'awiya's envoys were received with open arms by the citizens of Busra and Ali's Deputy-Governor Ziyad ibn Abihi, finding himself in a perilous situation, fled from Busra and sought refuge with the Banu Azd. From here Ziyad solicited for help from Ali, who sent an army and Ziyad then marched against the Syrians and set fire to the

Deputy-Governor of Busra Ziyad bin Abihi, found himself unable to oppose the invader and took to flight, seeking refuge with the neighbouring tribe of Banu Azd. From here he wrote to Ali asking for aid. Ali sent such troops as he could collect and with this reinforcement, Ziyad was able to give battle to the Syrians, near Busra, where he succeeded in routing the enemy. Hadrami was slain in the battle.

Busra was thus reclaimed for Ali, who re-appointed Ibn Abbas as governor, but Ali's hold over the city remained precarious. The populace, who had hailed Mu'awiya's emissaries with open arms, remained dissatisfied and seditious and Ibn Abbas was hard put to it to subdue the continued outbreaks of discontent.

The expedition to Busra was Mu'awiya's first attempt at invading Ali's territory and although the defeat inflicted on Syrian forces was decisive the victory for Ali was to prove only a temporary one.

### **The Rebellion of Khirrit bin Rashid 659 A.D.**

In the same year as the rebellion of the Kharajites against Ali came another rebellion, this time led by Khirrit bin Rashid, of the tribe of Banu Najiya. Though differing in dogma from the Kharajites, this rebellion was motivated by similar political aims and it was all the more bitter for Ali because its leader, Khirrit bin Rashid, was an old friend and ally of his who had fought shoulder to shoulder with him at the Battle of the Camel, had defended his cause valiantly at Siffin and had still been fighting with him as recently as Naharwan.

It was nevertheless the Decision of the Umpires which had caused Khirrit to leave Ali's side. Khirrit felt Ali ought to have bowed down to their judgment

castle in which they had taken refuge. Thus Mu'awiya's emissaries along with their 70 followers perished in the flames. Little credence can be placed on this version as it was improbable that the arrival of the Syrian emissaries could overawe Ziyad to an extent that he should take to flight. It must have been the arrival of the Syrian army that forced Ziyad to leave Busra and then seek reinforcement.

and that he should have referred the decision of the Caliphate to a Council of Elders as they had suggested. Ali attempted to appease Khirrit by inviting him to come and discuss matters with him but Khirrit and his followers left the town in disgust before the appointed hour and fled to Ahwaz.

Here Khirrit incited the Persians, the Kurds and the Christian who lived in the mountainous territory around Ahwaz, to withhold payment of taxes to Ali's government. Other disgruntled warriors soon joined him and in a short time he had raised a considerable army which invaded and occupied Fars, defeating the Alid governor who sought safety in flight.

Ali now sent his Kufite general Mu'quil bin Qais al-Tamimi against Khirrit, who was badly defeated at Ramhurmuz. Khirrit however succeeded in escaping to Bahrain, his native place, where he assiduously carried an extensive propaganda against Ali and where he continued to incite the people to withhold payment of taxes. Khirrit wanted the "Sadaqa" to be collected for the benefit of the poor of his own land instead of it being sent to the central treasury and hoarded for imperialistic purposes. Many of the people living in the area where Khirrit was so active went so far as to abandon Islam altogether in favour of Christianity.

In all, Ali was forced to send Maqil against Khirrit twice more. In the third and last encounter Khirrit and the 170 soldiers, who made up his personal force, were wiped out to a man.

Those Muslims who had supported Khirrit and had been captured in the campaign were now set at liberty on the condition that they swore allegiance to Ali. Things went less well for the Christian prisoners, who it was decided, were to be sold into captivity. The weeping and wailing of the Christian women and children as their menfolk prepared to leave them for ever, was so piteous that the hearts of the Muslim soldiers were deeply touched. One of Ali's Captains, Maskala, who was so moved by their plight that he offered him-

self to purchase the liberty of the Christians, promising to pay their ransom to the Caliph. The sum demanded in ransom was one thousand pieces for each captive. Quite unable to pay, the exorbitant sum Maskala was obliged to desert Ali and flee for safety to Damascus. He subsequently joined Mu'awiya who received him joyously.

As at Busra, the rebellion in Fars appeared to have been stamped out by the Alid soldiers, but although Southern Persia had been reclaimed for the Caliph, the people still spoke of Ali disparagingly, no longer looking upon him as their leader and guide, but a mere pawn in the hands of his army.

### **Ziyad Appointed Governor of Fars**

The governor who was now appointed to rule over Fars was Ziyad, the Deputy-Governor of Busra and a man who commanded great respect. His administrative ability, his tact and his diplomacy did much for the Alid cause and by cunningly setting one rebellious chief against another he managed so to weaken them all that they were glad to swear allegiance to Ali. Some of the princes Ziyad won over with promises of lucrative appointments and others he bought by granting them fiefs. In a short time he had restored peace and order in the province, making of it one of the few places in Ali's empire, at this time, where the people could go contentedly about their daily business.

Ziyad made his headquarters at Istakhar, (Persepolis) and from there the fame of his judgment spread far and wide. In the opinion of the Persian chroniclers his judicious and wise policy recalled the ancient days of an-Nusherwan, the Just, the famous ruler of the Sassanian dynasty of Persia. Certainly his presence in Fars did more for the cause of Ali than any other factor since the ill-fated Battle of Siffin, but not even Ziyad could do anything to re-establish the prestige of Ali the man.

**Mu'awiya Invades Iraq 659 A.D.**

Grown fat on the spoils of Egypt, the Syrians now began to cast covetous eyes on Iraq. Mu'awiya accordingly deputed Nu'man bin Bashir to ravage Ayn Tamr, Sufyan bin Auf to attack Hit and Anbar, Abdullah bin Mas'ada al-Fazari to invade Taima and Dahhak bin Qais to subdue Qutqutana. According to the chroniclers Yakubi and Waqidi, Mu'awiya himself came out with these troops to lead them towards Iraq, going as far as Tigris, before returning to Syria. Apparently these were plundering expeditions, their ostensible aim being to harass Ali, and to tax his energy and resources. "Their object", says Sir William Muir,<sup>1</sup> was various—now to ravage a province or surprise a citadel now to exact the tithe from the Bedouine tribes, or secure allegiance to himself. Such inroads, though not always successful, inspired a sense of insecurity; and worse, betrayed the lukewarmness of the people in the cause of Ali. These would stir neither hand nor foot to repel the Syrians invading villagers close even at their door. To show his displeasure at their listlessness and disobedience, Ali went forth himself into the field almost unattended. On this the men of Kufa, partly from shame, partly lured by promise of increased stipends, marched to the defence of their frontier. In the year 39 A.H. (659 A.D.) there were nearly a dozen inroads of this kind. Though eventually repelled, it was not always without loss of prisoners, plunder and prestige. One of Ali's commanders, with a flying column, pursued the raiders back into the heart of Syria as far as Baalbek; and thence turning northward, escaped by Ar-Rakka again into Al-Iraq. On the other hand, Mu'awiya to show his contempt for the power of Ali, made an incursion right across Mesopotamia, and for some days remained encamped on the banks of Tigris. After leisurely inspecting al-Musil, which he had never seen before, he made his way back to Damascus unmolested."

1. Sir William Muir. *The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline and Fall* p. 282.

**Mu'awiya Sends an Expedition to the Hijaz, 660 A.D.**

In the beginning<sup>1</sup> of 660 A.D., near the time of the annual pilgrimage, Mu'awiya sent an expedition of 3,000 horses, under the command of Busr bin Artat, to ravage the Hijaz. The chief objective of this enterprise was to seize the important cities of Mecca and Medina and so prepare the way for penetration into the Yemen (Arabia Felix). In addition, it was hoped that the capture of Hijaz would ring the death-knell of Ali's empire. Busr proved to be a cruel tyrant and his atrocities during this campaign earned him ever-lasting notoriety.

"The conquest of the Hijaz by the Syrians" says the Abbe De Marigny,"<sup>2</sup> was so rapid, that it had rather the appearance of a journey than a military expedition. The Arabians, who had had ample time to put their tents in a proper defensive position and prepare an army, had neither taken care of the one nor provided the other; so much so, that on the first approach of the Syrians the governor of the chief places abandoned their posts."

Medina at this juncture, was governed by Ali's deputy, Abu Ayub Ansari, who at the approach of the Syrian invaders, either could not or would not, offer any resistance. He is said to have been so much terrified that he fled from the capital. Busr, having thus entered the city without striking a blow, repaired to the Prophet's mosque, ascended the pulpit and calling out the names of the servants of the Caliph Uthman, asked them to explain what they had done to their master. The Medinites, were quick to appreciate his true meaning and, fearing greatly for the future, began to shed tears of repentance for the past. Busr, unmoved by their lamentations continued to lash them with scorn, "To

1. Waqidi places this expedition in 42 A.H. (662 A.D.) after Ali's death. Bakkaï places it at the end of Ali's reign. As the entire Caliphate passed to Mu'awiya after the death of Ali, Waqidi's version could not be taken as true, for there was no necessity for Mu'awiya to conquer those parts which he had already incorporated in his empire. In all probability the expedition was led in 660 A.D.

2. Abbe De Marigny—History of the Arabian Caliphs. p. 67, Publishers T. Payne London. Ed. 1768.

what cause", he demanded, "am I to ascribe this sorrow in the murderers of a lawful sovereign? Where has that grey bearded, aged man gone, to whom I swore allegiance at this very spot, as it were yesterday? Verily, but for my promise to Mu'awiya who ordered me to sheathe the sword, I would not have left one of you alive. Now clearly understand that whosoever declines to swear allegiance to Mu'awiya will taste the wrath of my sword."

After this the entire city swore allegiance to Mu'awiya. Leaving Abu Hurreriah to govern Medina, Busr now advanced on Mecca. Mecca was at this time governed by Ali's cousin Ibn Abbas, a man it might have been thought, who could have been relied on to stand up for Ali's cause; but Ibn Abbas did precisely what the Deputy-Governor of Medina had done. He fled from the city, the inhabitants offered no resistance, Busr entered the Mosque, and the same scene, so dramatically played at Medina, was re-enacted. The Meccans like the Medinates, swore allegiance to Mu'awiya in a body.

It is indeed depressing to note how little the provincial governors did in the way of opposing the invader. In all probability they knew themselves to be hopelessly handicapped by the disaffection that prevailed in almost every corner of Ali's empire. Then too, there was the awe and terror in which the people held Busr. So appalling was the news of the atrocities he had inflicted that the people fled from their homes and took refuge in the desert rather than risk staying to face his reign of terror. No provincial governor could have hoped to rally an army against such overwhelming odds and for a cause as unpopular as Ali's.

### **Abu Musa Swears Allegiance to Mu'awiya**

Amongst those who fled from Mecca was Abu Musa, the Umpire who had been appointed to speak for Ali. Even though he had given his decision against Ali, Abu Musa was not prepared to stay and face

Mu'awiya's general, for he had also arbitrated against Mu'awiya. He was captured by the Syrians while attempting to escape and when asked by Busr why he was going to abscond he replied simply, "I fled for my life. "Then said Busr," Know ye well Mu'awiya's orders. His instructions are not to kill the followers of the Holy Prophet but to extract homage for him from them." Abu Musa for fear of his life, then took the oath of allegiance to Mu'awiya and without any further molestation retired to his home.

### **The Syrians Ravage the Yemen**

From the Hijaz, Busr went on through the Southern parts of the Arabian peninsula until he reached the borders of the Yemen. Another cousin of Ali, Ubaydullah ibn Abbas, attempted to defend the province on Ali's behalf, but the small, ill-equipped army which was all that he had been able to raise, was completely routed. According to Mirkhond, at the approach of Busr Ibn Abbas made a precipitate retreat, leaving the hazard of repelling the invasion to his deputy Abdullah Harithi, who fought a pitched battle with Busr. As a result of the ensuing encounter Abdullah was defeated and killed, and the subsequent atrocities of Busr on the Yemenites were more or less retaliatory. Ibn Abbas himself fled from the battlefield, escaping to Kufa, where he sought refuge with Ali.

Meanwhile back in the Yemen, Busr put both Ibn Abbas's children to the sword. That Second Nero had also butchered the children of Kothem ibn Abbas together with their Bedvi governess, who had protested against the deed.

When Ali heard of the fate of his cousin's children, his mortification was so great that he cursed him, imploring God to deprive him of reason. Busr did in fact become insane. We further read that during one of his fits of insanity, Busr called for his sword. His servants brought him one made of wood and supplied him with a

skin that had been blown on which to exercise his fury. He is said to have used so much violence on it that he died of the exertion.

To oppose Busr in the Yemen Ali mustered a force of 4,000 men under the command of Jariah ibn Kedaumah and Wauhib ibn Massaoud the Thaqifite from Kufa. On the way to the Yemen the Alid Commander passed through the territory of Nejran, the inhabitants of which belonged to the Ummayyad party and supported Uthman. They were ruthlessly put to the sword.

It was now the turn of Busr to flee for his life. Scarcely had the Alid army reached the borders of the Yemen when Busr made good his escape to Syria.

On the way back from the Yemen, the relieving army forced the Medinites and the Meccans—again at the point of the sword to recant their allegiance to Mu'awiya. The peninsula thus suffered bitterly, both from the ravages of the Syrian troops and from the relieving army of Ali. Their distress added greatly to the burdens already overwhelming Ali.

### **Ali Negotiates for Peace**

Uptil now, Ali's forces had managed to regain all the ground that had been lost to Mu'awiya, but although the extreme gravity of the situation had led the people to make some belated attempts at defending their homes. Ali knew that they were in no way with him in spirit. Dejected and broken-hearted, he decided to sue for peace. At least, he felt, he could save them from a recurrence of the atrocities which had been committed by Busr in Mu'awiya name.

Some authorities maintain that it was Mu'awiya, not Ali, who opened negotiations for peace. According to Tabari, a truce was effected in 400 A.H. (660 A.D.) By it hostilities were to cease and the Caliphate was to be partitioned. Ali was to recognise Mu'awiya as the ruler of Egypt and Syria, while Mu'awiya was to acknowledge him as the ruler of all the rest of the Islamic

Commonwealth.

### **Mu'awiya Declares Himself Caliph at Jerusalem**

If such a truce really took place, it may well have been another ruse of Mu'awiya to give to Ali a false sense of security. At any rate this hollow peace did not last long. By July 660 A.D., so our chroniclers say, Mu'awiya was already in Jerusalem proclaiming himself Caliph of all the Islamic Empire and receiving the homage of the Syrians.

Many chroniclers assert that Ali was so staggered by Mu'awiya's assumption of full sovereign<sup>1</sup> powers that he began to make huge preparations for an attack on Syria.

### **Abdullah ibn Abbas Defaults**

At this period of Ali's life the sympathetic reader may begin to detect some stirring of the old energy that had once been characteristic, of the "Lion of God". But if some traces of returning vigour appeared at one time or another they were superficial and short-lived. One further betrayal was to cast him back again into the depths of despair and perhaps that was the last straw which broke the proverbial back of the camel.

Ali had appointed his cousins, the four sons of Al-Abbas, to the four different governorship: to one of them had been assigned the government of Yemen, another held the government of Mecca, the third ruled Medina, while Abdullah, the fourth, and eldest, held the government of Busra. Abdullah who had stood by Ali most loyally through thick and thin, is said to have misappropriated government money. When called to account by Ali he disobeyed the summons and escaped to Mecca with the State treasury. This broke Ali's heart.

1. Those historians who say that Mu'awiya did not assume the role of Caliph till after Ali's death cannot be relied upon, because traditions unanimously hold that Ali before his death had collected an army of 40,000 strong to lead an expedition to Syria. Ali could have collected such heavy odds only if Mu'awiya had assumed sovereign powers.

## CHAPTER XVIII

# ALI'S MARTYRDOM

### **The Disaffection of the Kharajites**

The prospect of a truce between Ali and Mu'awiya did not please the Kharajites. For one thing, a strong and stable government would put an end to the plundering raids on which so many of them depended for enormous wealth and booty. At the same time the fanatically pious amongst them longed fervently for the restoration of God's kingdom on earth and believed that this could never be accomplished while Ali and Mu'awiya remained alive. To the Kharajites, they were both ambitious tyrants who had usurped power and established ungodly kingdoms in defiance of the will of God.

### **A Concerted Plot**

Many of the Kharajites, after the battle of Nahrawan, had gone to Mecca, to find sanctuary, in Ka'ba the house of God. Here they had frequent religious and political meetings in the holy sanctuary, devising plans to avenge their relatives who had fallen at Nahrawan. Here, too, they planned the assassination of Ali and Mu'awiya, adding a third name to the list of the ungodly Amr bin As. They feared that Amr bin As, the wily Umpire, might lay claim to the Caliphate for himself in the event of the death of Mu'awiya.

The three boldest of these Meccan Kharajites, Abd Rahman ibn Muljam al-Sarimi, Burk ibn Abdu

and Amr bin Bakr volunteered to rid the world of the tyrants. Abdur Rahman agreed to kill Ali, Burk to dispatch Mu'awiya and Amr to murder Amr bin As now governor of Egypt. The morning of Friday, the 17th of Ramdan was fixed for the execution. The three assassins then poisoned their swords and swore to kill their enemies or perish in the holy deed. Then they separated, Abdur Rahman taking the road to Kufa, Burk that to Damascus and Amr that to Egypt.

### **Abdur Rahman's Proposal of Marriage**

Abdur Rahman arrived in Kufa and began making secret plans. Help came to him from an unexpected quarter, for he fell passionately in love with a lady who had a great hatred for Ali. This was the beauteous Qutaum, whose father and brother, according to one account and, whose uncle and husband, according to another, had been slain by Ali at the Battle of Nahrawan. Qutaum was outstandingly beautiful and was described by an Arab chronicler as possessing, "a face which would be the just reward of the Virtuous" and of "jet black tresses which fell on her cheek and resembled the ignominious record of a villain's guilt". Abdur Rahman was quite unable to resist such attractions and when he proposed a match, Qutaum declared herself willing to marry him on three conditions. He was to give her three thousand dirhems in cash, a male and a female slaves and the head of Caliph Ali. Abdur Rahman had come to Kufa with the express purpose of killing Ali and he therefore found no difficulty in agreeing to her terms. Qutaum told him that he must attack Ali when he was least expecting it. "Should you escape alive", she continued, "you will have my hand and a happy domestic life with me; but should you perish in the assault, you will enjoy a better life in Heaven above than you would have done on earth with a poor soul like me."

In order to help her suitor, Qutaum asked a man of her tribe, Werdan, to join the conspiracy, and it was also

through her persuasion that Shub'ib bin Bijrah of the tribe of Ashjah agreed to join in the plot. The three conspirators now anxiously waited for the arrival of the 17th of Ramdan-the day fixed for the ghastly murder.

### **Mu'awiya Escapes With a Wound**

The chosen day arrived and Burk ibn Abdullah, in Damsacus, attacked Mu'awiya while he was conducting divine service in the Mosque, wounding him in the loins. Burk was caught red-handed and when brought before Mu'awiya boasted that his associate Abdur Rahman, would by that time, have killed Ali in Kufa. To this Mu'awiya replied, "Ali may have escaped in the same way as I." Mu'awiya then ordered his men to cut off the feet of his would be assassin and take out his tongue. Burk was then dragged out of his presence to be further tortured and put to a cruel and ignominious death.

Mu'awiya's wound did not prove fatal. His physician gave him two alternatives, one being cautery and the other to drink a draught which would render him impotent. Mu'awiya chose the second, saying, "My two sons, Abdullah and Yezid, are enough for me and I do not require more." It was characteristic that after his recovery, he took elaborate precautions for his future safety. Part of the Mosque was railed off and it was further guarded by soldiers with drawn swords, ever ready to defend him in emergency. Mu'awiya was far too much in love with life ever again to run the risk of losing it. How different his attitude was from that Ali will be seen later in this chapter.

### **Amr bin As Escapes Death**

In Egypt, Amr bin Bakr went to the Mosque on morning of the 17th Ramdan to assassinate Amr bin As always luck favoured Amr bin As, who was prevented by an attack of colic from leading divine service on

fatal day. In his stead his deputy, Kharja bin Huzafa was officiating. Amr bin Bakr, who had never seen either of them before and was unaware of the change slew Kharja with one stroke of his sword. When asked later by Amr bin As what his motive for the murder had been, he replied, "O thou sinner, the stroke was not intended for any other than thyself". "But God", said the wily governor, "intended it for another." Amr bin Bakr was forthwith put to a cruel death.

### **Ali's Nightly Vigils in the Mosque at Kufa**

Of the three assassins, it was Abdur Rahman who had the easiest task for Ali. He had long been accustomed to spend night after night alone in the mosque, in prayer and meditation. It was not unusual for him to kneel on his prayer mat at sunset and there pass the whole night long in prayer until the dawn of the next day. This habit of his had occasioned alarm among the few followers still sincerely devoted to him. "Is it not sheer folly," they said, "to attend the Mosque at night, unaccompanied and without escort, in the midst of so many enemies. We who are loyal to him take those precautions for his safety which he himself neglects." A small group took it in turns to guard Ali, unknown to the Caliph himself. When eventually he was apprised of the existence of this Volunteer guard he said to them, "Are you here to defend me from the decrees of heaven or against the hostilities of my enemies." "Lord", they replied, "how can we defend you against the decrees of heaven. We guard you against the evil plans of your enemies and their treacherous designs. We are only here to see that no one injures or assails you." "Then" said Ali, "you must remember that the fate of even the most insignificant creature on this earth is controlled and supervised by God." With this, he dismissed the guard and forebade their nightly vigils.

Thus it was that Ali, according to his wont came to be entirely alone on the fateful 17th of Ramdan, waiting

for the doom which he expected.

### **Ali is Forewarned of his Doom**

Shi'ite Traditions abound in confirming that the Caliph was forewarned of his doom and that he had been visited by several presages of his death. He is said to have seen the Holy Prophet in a dream and to have complained to him about the hostile conduct of his Muslim subjects, asking the Holy Prophet to invoke divine justice against the sinners. Ali is then said to have prayed to God thus, "O Lord, in view of my piety and sincere love to you, grant me the company of far superior beings than those against whom I complain, and send over these unruly subjects a far worse being than myself." Ali's prayers were soon to be granted.

Another tradition says that a short time before his assassination Ali asked his sons Hasan and Hussain what date it was and on being told the fifteenth, the Caliph said, "I will continue to be your guest for five more days." On the preceding Monday morning, when one of the female attendants of Ali was pouring water over his hands, Ali rubbed his beard, and prophesied "Alas for these silver hairs which by Friday evening will be crimsoned with my own blood."

Similarly we are told that on Friday morning, the seventeenth of Ramdan, when Ali set out for the mosque, a flock of domestic birds, startled at his appearance, raised a loud outcry as he passed through the yard. One of the attendants threw a stick at them but was at once told by Ali to stop. "Let them alone", said the Caliph, "for their cries are only lamentations foreboding my death."

### **Ali is Mortally Wounded**

On the Fateful Friday morning of the 17th Ramadan, Abdur Rahman, Shaubib bin Bijrah and Werdun went to the Central Mosque at Kufa just before the break of

dawn. There they took up their positions in the narrow passage leading to the mosque and waited for Ali to enter. The moment the Caliph set foot in<sup>1</sup> the Mosque, while it was still dark, Werdun attacked but missed his aim. With more accuracy, Abdur Rahman then struck Ali on the forehead, the point of his poisoned sword penetrating through the scar of an old wound to the brain. The assassins then fled.

Shortly afterwards the congregation began to assemble in the Mosque for the dawn prayers. There they found Ali lying wounded on his prayer mat. They asked him who the miscreant had been, receiving as reply that God would soon overtake him.

Werdun is said to have fled to his house, where he was soon after put to death by his own relatives, who were horrified to learn what he had done. Shaubib appears to have made good his escape but Abdur Rahman was arrested and brought before Ali. "What could be the motive of your assault"? asked Ali, "have I not loaded you and your clan with benefits". To this Abdur Rahman replied, "For forty days I have whiten-ed my sword with poison and prayed to Almighty God to ask him to help me to put an end to the most sinful and wicked of human beings." "That", said Ali, "must be none other than yourself," and he delivered Abdur Rahman to the custody of his guards. Then, sending for his son, Hasan, the Caliph said, "Should I die, the life of this assassin is forfeit. Kill him with a single stroke and see that you neither mutilate him, nor let him suffer a lingering death from hunger and thirst, for it is forbidden by the Holy Prophet."

Ali's daughter, Um Kulthum, lacked her father's charity. On the day following the assault she is said to

1. Conflicting accounts regarding the martyrdom of Ali have come down to us. Some hold that the Caliph was assaulted while entering the Mosque, whereas others maintain that Abdur Rahman gave him a fatal blow while conducting prayers when he lay in the position of prostration on the mat. The Shi'ite legends emphatically urge that it was well-nigh impossible to kill Ali in a state of consciousness, for the Caliph's body was like that of steel when awake and like that of wax when prostrated in prayers before God. So according to these legends, Abdur Rahman killed Ali while he was prostrating on the mat in prayers.

have visited the prisoner and to have cursed him, saying that it was a perfidious deed and that its perpetrator would go straight to hell. She then began to weep, saying "O thou enemy of God, perchance my father will still survive..." "Then" said the assassin, "Why those tears in your eyes? But the sword with which I attacked the Caliph cost me a thousand silver coins, and a thousand more it cost me to impregnate it with poison. None can escape the assault of this sabre."

No antidote could be found for the poison and Ali's condition rapidly deteriorated. When they saw that his condition had become critical, his courtiers, led by Jundib ibn Abdullah, asked him whether in the event of his death they should raise his son, Hasan, to the Caliphate. True to the principles of democracy, the dying Caliph said, "I have neither any authority to command it, nor do I forbid you to do it. See to it yourself." He then asked his sons Hasan and Hussain to come near him so that he might give them his last testament.

### **Ali's Last Testament**

To his sons Ali spoke thus: "Remain steadfast in piety and resign yourself to the will of God. Never aspire to anything which is beyond your reach. Always be truthful and merciful towards the orphans. Help the poor and needy, and try to live in the world in a way which may help it to become better. Stop the tyrant from his oppressions. Assist the afflicted and act upon the commandments of God; and do not be put off by any obstacles. Lastly, I ask you to bury me in some place which is unknown to the public. No less than 10,000 persons have I killed by my own hands on different occasions, and I do not wish their relatives violate the sanctuary of my repose, and expose corpse to indignity."

After this interview with Hasan and Hussain, Caliph addressed his third son, Muhammad ibn Hanf

and said, "You have heard what I have told your other two brothers. I also enjoin you to act upon these behests. In particular, I command you to respect and obey your elder brothers. They have a right to claim your fealty. Do whatever they command you, without delay." Then, addressing the other members of his family, he continued, "O thou Hashimites! After I am gone, do not spill Muslim blood, and do not kill any one except my murderer."

Right until the end, Ali continued to think of the good of the Muslim community, to fulfil the commands embodied in the Holy Qur'an and to submit to the will of God. Repeatedly calling upon the name of God and constantly re-affirming the belief in the Unity of God and in the divine mission of the Holy Prophet, Ali was to survive the mortal wound for three days.<sup>1</sup> Speech was finally silenced by the approach of death on the third day.

## **The Death of Ali**

At the time of his tragic death, according to one account, Ali was 58 years old, and according to the reckoning of his son, Hasan, he was 63. He had reigned for four years and nine months. Such was the simplicity of Ali's life that after his death only seven silver coins were found in his possession, for he had always spent what came in to the imperial treasury on the poor and needy. This insignificant patrimony is startling, considering that the revenues that came to Ali's government exceeded millions of pounds, but entirely consistent with what is known of his character, Ali's prayers had been answered after all. He had attained martyrdom and would henceforth sit with the blessed

1. We cannot determine with precision the date of Ali's death. He obtained martyrdom in the middle of Ramadan in 40 A.H. and varying dates are given ranging from 19th Ramadan to 21st Ramadan. Waqidi in Tabri gives 24th January 661 A.D., whereas Masudi gives 27th January 661 A.D., and Mirkhond (author of Rousa-tu-Safa) gives 26th January, A.D. But the widely accepted date is the 31st January, which seems more probable because this day was nearer to the 22nd which was Friday.

on high, among companions "far superior" to those against whose treachery he had complained during his nightly vigils in the Mosque at Kufa.

### **The Interment of Ali's Remains**

In obedience to Ali's last will, his corpse was buried in secret by his sons, in a spot concealed from the sight of all but his own family. During the reign of the Umayyad rulers (661-750 A.D.) Ali's descendants did not disclose the identity of Ali's place of interment, fearing lest these rulers should disgrace his dead body by opening the grave. It is for this reason that the exact place of Ali's burial lay concealed for centuries. Some said that Ali's grave was near Baghdad, some at Kufa and still others at Mizar Sharif, situated on the border of Afghanistan, and it was not until the reign of the Abbasid ruler as-Safah (750-54 A.D.) that Ali's grave was located, and a tomb stone erected.

### **Najaf Sharif and the Tomb**

The famous Abbasid Caliph Harun-al-Rashid (785-809 A.D.) is said to have enlarged the tomb and entrusted its management to a chief of the tribe of the Banu Asad. It is generally held that Ali's remain, were laid at Najf, situated in the vicinity of Kufa, lying close by the dike which protects the city against the inundations of the Euphrates, which developed into the modern town of Mushhad Ali, to which million of Muslim pilgrims now throng on pilgrimage to the holy sanctuary.

The Shi'ite legends dwell at length on how the Abbaside Caliph Harun-al-Rashid went deer-hunting near Kufa, and how a deer ran to Ali's grave and the hounds would not touch it, standing instead at the foot of the grave while the Caliph realised it was Ali's place of burial. Since then all those who took shelter at it are immune from all dangers. The miracle of the

unharmd deer led to Ali's tomb becoming a holy place and a sanctuary. The Caliph Harun-al-Rashid is said to have enlarged the tomb and the Shi'ite ministers, Muiz-ad-Dowla and Azi'd-ad-Dowla had it further beautified.

In 1399 A.D. when Timur, the scourge of humanity returned successfully from his Indian campaign, he further enlarged the building but the work of later beautification and completion was left to Nadir Shah, who after his conquest of India in 1739 A.D. spent a good deal of money on the decoration of the tomb. The tomb is called "Najf Sharif" (the holy Najf) and to the Shias it is second only to Mecca. Today the management is in the hands of the rulers of Persia, who spend huge amounts on the upkeep of the building and the pilgrims that come to visit it.

### **Sword, Horse, Flag and the Signet ring, the Reminiscence of Divinely-Inspired Gifts**

The Shi'ite traditions maintain that Ali was presented by the Holy Prophet with four divinely-inspired gifts—a sword, a horse, a flag, and a signet ring. God is said to have sent a sword from heaven named "Dhul-faqar" to the Holy Prophet Muhammad, who made a present of the same to Ali. It was with this sword that Ali fought all the battles of Islam and killed thousands of his enemies. The sword is said to have passed in legacy to Hasan and then Hussain and on to their descendants, the Imams. The Great Imam Medhi, the twelfth Imam of the Shias (who will appear at the end of this world) will fight the battles of Islam with this very sword and purge the world of all its evils.

Similarly the Holy Prophet is said to have made a present of his white horse called "Dul Dul" to Ali who rode and fought his battles on it. In the battle of Hunian, Ali was victorious while riding this horse and if the Shi'ite legends are to be credited the animal at the command of his master, crouched so near the ground

that Ali was able to pick up a handful of pebbles and throw them at the enemy, a manoeuvre which led to its utter rout. The Shias, every year, at the time of taking out the Taziyas (passion plays) in Muharrum, lead their procession by a horse which is symbolic of Ali's "Dul Dul"—an animal with which Hussain fought at the battlefield of Kerbala and fell fighting.

The Holy Prophet in a similar way bestowed a flag on Ali which he carried in all his wars against the enemies of Islam. This is believed to have been passed on to the last Imam, who will fight the battle of Islam with "Dhulfaqr" under this flag at the end of the world.

In a similar fashion, the angel Gabriel is said to have presented two rings, one to the Holy Prophet, and the other to Ali which he (Gabriel) said should be worn on the finger of the right hand. It is held that Ali's ring was endowed with miraculous powers. The Umayyad rulers changed this tradition and began to wear rings on the left hand. Ali's ring is held to have been passed on to his descendants, the Imams, who worked miracles with it.

### **Comments on Ali's Assassination by Various Western Writers**

"The murderous assault upon Ali" says Wellhausen,<sup>1</sup> "took place on Friday, the 15th Ramdan 40 A.H. in the Mosque at Kufa. He died on the following Sunday, 24th January 661 A.D. These dates of Waqidi in Tabatabari 13,469;2,18, are confirmed by the specified days of the week, and the varying ones refuted. The murderer, Ibn Muljim, of Murad, or more precisely of Tajub (kamil, 553,17) was a Kharajite. The Khawaraj proudly call him in Tab, 2,18, "Our brother of Murad". Verses of his tribal companion, Ibn Maiyas in Tab, 13,466, testify that he was incited to the murder by a woman Qautaum, who made it the condition of his

1. Wellhausen, J. The Arab kingdom and its fall. p. 103, Translation by Margaret Graham. Publishers University of Calcutta. Ed. 1927.

winning her as his bride that he should take vengeance upon Ali for Nahrawan. This rules out the account which can only artificially be made to harmonise viz., that he was one of those Kharajites who had committed the murder under the oath taken in Mecca to rid the congregation of Muhammad in one day of the three tyrants, Ali, Mu'awiya and Amr. A private oath taken thus by three persons is not in keeping with the usages of the oldest Khawarij, as Ibn Athir has already remarked. Abu'l Aswad's insinuation that Mu'awiya hired the murderer has never found the slightest credence even with his foes, though undoubtedly the murder was to his advantage, for by that alone he won the kingdom. In Tab: 2,3, Hasan bin Ali reproaches the Kufites with having killed his father, and the Caliph Mansur expresses himself similarly in Tabrai 3,431. From this it appears that Ibn Muljim and Qautum were at home in Kufa. cf Tab, 13,456 ff; 3,465 ff, Yaqubi 2,251 f; Kamil 546 off; 583."

### **Abdur Rahman ibn Muljim's fate**

Conflicting accounts have also come down to us about the subsequent fate of Abdur Rahman ibn Muljim. Some say that after the performance of the funeral rites of Ali, his son Hasan summoned Abdur Rahman in his presence, and after a summary trial, ordered him to be executed by a single stroke, in accordance with Ali's dying behest. Others allege that Abdur Rahman was as fearless as a lion when ushered into the presence of Hasan, and said to him, "I made a covenant with Almighty God, in the sacred house of Allah at Kab'ah, that I would slay both Ali and Mu'awiya. I have accomplished one objective. Now should you allow me I will go forward and accomplish the other, or perish in the attempt. Should I succeed in my endeavour I will return to you and swear allegiance to you." "Not so," replied Hasan, "Not before you have tasted of fire". Then Ibn Muljim was put to death and the

corpse was put in a sack and committed to the flames. Still others say that after the burial of Ali, his nephew Abdullah bin Jafar commanded the murderer's eyes to be seared with red hot irons and his hands and feet to be cut off. Abdur Rahman, is said to have borne his afflictions with magnificent fortitude, uttering no cry, but when an order was given for his tongue to be torn out, he broke out into wild lamentations. Abdullah ibn Jafar is reported to have asked Abdur Rahman the reason for such an outburst, and to have received the reply, "I am not afraid of the pain but what grieves me most is the reflection that with the loss of my tongue, in the last moments of my life, I shall be deprived of the consolation of repeating the name of God, which is the greatest solace to me at this hour."

There seems little doubt that, in the eyes of the Kharajites, and in his own mind, Abdur Rahman was a martyr, confident of the rewards in paradise which Qutaum had told him would await his death.

### **The Close of the Patriarchal Age**

With the death of Ali the "Khalifat-i-Rashida" or the Orthodox Caliphate, came to an end. It had been an illustrious chapter in the history of Islam, an age of patriarchy and of an ideal theocracy when the sovereigns lived only for the propagation of the faith, for the service of God and His human beings. The orthodox Caliphs had abstained from pomp and secular gaiety, resigning themselves to the will of the Almighty. They set a personal example of piety and virtue and, in their missionary zeal, they concerned themselves with the betterment of their subject races. Above all, they loved death better than this life on earth and longed for the day when they should be re-united in paradise with the Holy Prophet. Abu Bakr, Umar the Great, Uthman and Ali are considered, in the annals of Islam, to be the noblest, the finest, best and worthiest of the Holy Prophet's successors.

In spiritual and temporal knowledge Ali excelled all three of his predecessors. Unfortunately he lacked that acute wordly sense of statesmanship which alone could have achieved an efficient administration at the time of his unwilling accession. They were troubled times in Islam when Ali became Caliph. Had his people given to him, as their Caliph, the support, loyalty and admiration that they had given him in his youth, his reign would have become a Golden Age indeed. No one wished more than he to put into practice the principles of Muslim jurisprudence, ethics, metaphysics, political science—and of the simple daily conduct—which he had so brilliantly expounded at the height of his popularity. Ali, the young military commander and “Lion of God” appears to have been an uncomplicated character and one that his followers could understand. In his maturity, his ability to see both sides of a question and his more complicated and intellectual approach to leadership resulted in his being often at variance with his fellow Muslims; indeed in many ways he was far in advance of his time, particularly in his desire for peace through negotiation.

What the people needed after the assassination of Uthman was leadership, superb, simple, straightforward and clear-cut. They did not know themselves what it was that they sought, and their abortive attempts at democracy deteriorated into riots and anarchy and civil wars for want of a firm hand, and an administration with an efficient and easily understood policy. Instead of establishing peace at home, expansion abroad and equity of justice throughout Islam, Ali found himself wavering, hesitating, deferring, procrastinating—a helpless victim in the hands of unscrupulous men who had insisted on his assuming so-called sovereign powers. It seems that he either could not or would not make the bold decisions which alone might have suppressed the riots and saved Islam from civil wars.

What happened to Ali, the bold, the decisive, confident young man? The military leader who had never

been known to give in, however hopeless the outcome of the battle might have appeared to be, the commander who had so often turned certain defeat into jubilant victory, the zealous Muslim who had inspired his fellow Muslims to seek martyrdom rather than compromise. Perhaps it is a question that only a psychologist can answer. Betrayed on all sides Ali as Caliph seems to have found the burden of government too great to bear and to have retreated into a private world of depression, solitude and grief. His final days were spent almost entirely in prayer and meditation, deeply troubled by the fate of his beloved 'Islam and conscious that he was quite powerless to avert the catastrophes which he, in his wisdom, knew were yet to come. His was the tragedy of a man who had discovered the eternal varieties, who knew what was right but who could not persuade or inspire the men of his age to yield to his wishes, share his beliefs or follow his example.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE CAUSES OF ALI'S FAILURE  
AND SOME OPINIONS ABOUT HIM**Bitter opposition of the Quraish**

Before we may close this book, let us examine the reasons why Ali failed. He had hoped to establish a world-Islamic Empire, a kingdom of God on earth, where peace was to reign supreme and mankind would move steadily towards perfection. That he failed so completely is one of the enigmas of Islamic history. The student is perplexed, and indeed despondent, when he discovers that the entire tribe of the Quraish gave whole-hearted support to the first two Caliphs, Abu Bakr, who belonged to the tribe of the Banu Taim, and Umar the Great, who belonged to the tribe of the Banu Adi, but not to their two successors, who also belonged to the Quraish tribe. It is baffling indeed that they obeyed Abu Bakr and Umar blindly, but deserted Uthman and Ali, whom they bitterly opposed and finally murdered. From the moment that Ali came to power, he was resisted and obstructed by the Qurashites, in spite of the fact that the aristocratic Quraish knew that Ali had noble blood in his veins, blood which had flowed in the veins of the Holy Prophet, and that in addition he had those personal traits of character which made him unique amongst all the persons of his age. Ali's knowledge, piety, bravery, generalship, services for the propagation of Islam, and his achievements on the battlefield for the defence of Islam, made him superior to the first two Caliphs; he was superbly equipped

to fill the office of the Caliph, yet the entire race seems to have taken up arms against him. In spite of his qualities of mind and spirit he seems to have been sacrificed to the prevailing tribal spirit of his countrymen.

Perhaps it was his superiority, more than anything else, which led to his downfall. He knew himself to be superior to his contemporaries and he hated the petty tribal chiefs of the Quraish who were interested only in their own self-aggrandisement. What is more, he let them know his contempt for them, seldom bothering with the formalities of consulting them and frequently acting independently of them, in defiance of established custom.

### **The Causes of his Failure**

The reasons of his failure may therefore be as follows:—

#### **(a) The Superiority Complex**

His feelings of superiority were perhaps the main cause of the rupture between him and his countrymen. At the outset of his reign Talha and Zubair proffered him allegiance but later on both of them complained to Ali that he treated them as nobodies, and hardly consulted them in matters of state policy or any other important affair. Ali replied, "Your complaint is groundless. Can you tell me of a single instance in which I have usurped your rights or that of any Muslim at any time or acted contrary to the commandments of God? I swear by God, I had not the least desire to become a Caliph, but when power has been thrust upon me, I must enforce divine injunctions on all of you. I do not need the advice of any individual. The advice of the Qur'an is sufficient for me." The manner in which he dismissed their grievances, so alienated the sympathies of Talha and Zubair that they both took up arms against him. The high-handed dismissal of Uthman provincial governors was another step in which Ali

overbearing attitude could not be justified. Even when he was in the right, his refusal to listen courteously to the advice of his counsellors often made him appear to be thoroughly imperious. He loathed the men with little minds who crowded round him, the time-servers, the jobmongers, the self-seekers and scorned to compete with them. He knew that, in intellectual ability and in the power of original thinking, he towered head and shoulders above his contemporaries and he saw no reason to submit himself to their criticism. They were obtuse and mediocre, their morality easily swayed by caprice and greed and he wanted none of them.

The assumption of superiority became, as he grew older, more and more pronounced. His adversaries described his temperament as haughty and unbearable. Undoubtedly his early failures to become Caliph must have affected his self-confidence and he seems, more and more to have erected barriers between himself and the people. In spite of his gifted eloquence he could not sway the crowd. He appealed only to small circles of scholars with kindred minds and his cold intellectualism chilled the warm-hearted populace.

#### (b) **His Unwavering Adherence to Principles**

Another factor which was sure to create enemies was his refusal to deviate a hair's breadth from any principle in which he believed. His strong sense of justice led him to enforce the Qur'anic laws on the chieftains of the Quraish without any distinction of rank or merit and the virulence with which he humbled many of the big magnates converted many a potential friend into a life-long foe. Uthman had bestowed fiefs on his kinsmen in the manner and custom of the day. These, Ali summararily confiscated, thereby provoking the chiefs to rebellion. Even his own brother, Aqil, went over to Mu'awiya because Ali would not increase his allowance. Ali felt, and rightly so, that the State exchequer was a trust which should not be wasted on extravagances but he would not attempt to offer any

explanation for his refusal. He never at any time, seems to have considered it necessary to implement new ideas and new measures with tact. Tact was something he felt he could do without, but his lack of it contributed largely to the failure of his noble ideals, ideals which presented with more humility and persuasion, might yet have succeeded.

### (c) **Magnanimity Mis-interpreted as Weakness**

Ali believed in freedom of speech and action and had therefore granted these to his subjects. Interference in an individual's personal liberty was a heinous offence in the eyes of Ali. It is, however, doubtful whether the fickle and illiterate Arab multitude was as yet ready for such freedoms. They needed a strong ruler to check their seditions and they took undue advantage of Ali's magnanimity on many occasions, considering it to be a form of weakness. After rebelling against Caliph Uthman and raising Ali to the Caliphate they became fully aware of their own power, expecting Ali to be a grateful puppet in their hands. That Ali was too proud and stiff-necked to submit to their wishes increased their insolent defiance and their appointment of arbiters after the battle of Siffin demonstrates how loose was the hold that Ali had over them.

### (d) **Lax Discipline in Ali's Army**

The underlying fundamental cause of the success of the early Muslims was the strict discipline that prevailed in their ranks. Under Ali, this discipline disintegrated. Not only were the ranks full of disgruntled soldiers, constantly brawling, bickering and openly disobeying orders, but there was also a breach of faith between the high-ranking officers who instead of setting an example of loyalty to their men, showed themselves to be equally dissatisfied with Ali's leadership. The audacity with which they intercepted Ali's letter on the battlefield at Siffin shows how deplorably lax the discipline had become.

Ali's enemies, on the other hand, were led by distinguished generals who enforced the strictest discipline in their army. In the Syrian troops the orders of the senior officers were obeyed blindly by their juniors and the men showed an unswerving, personal loyalty towards Mu'awiya. Criticism of Mu'awiya's orders was unheard of and no one would have dared to do anything seditious.

### **(e) Ali's Parsimony Compared with Mu'awiya's munificence**

Ali's scrupulous handling of state revenues neither pleased his friends nor won over any of his enemies. Ever mindful of rendering an account to God, he kept track of every penny that came to the Royal Treasury. Not even his brother and cousins were spared the duty of accounting for every farthing, a demand which finally led to their deserting Ali for Mu'awiya who gave them more munificent treatment.

Nor would Ali pardon even the slightest mistakes on the part of his subordinates, while misappropriation or embezzlement called down the heaviest punishment. Mu'awiya, on the other hand, spent money like water. With his lavishness he could and did buy Ali's staunchest supporters, earning their loyalty by bestowing fiefs and rewards in cash on them. How winsome Mu'awiya's munificence was may be seen from the fact that his court at Damascus<sup>1</sup> became a rendezvous for all those disaffected chiefs who had deserted Ali. They drew handsome pensions from the Syrian treasury and Mu'awiya had no scruples as to where the money came from, or how it was spent.

### **(f) Ali's Hatred of Foppish Display**

As a boy in the household of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) Ali had learnt the value of prayer and

1. Damascus was the one and only centre of Mu'awiya's realm, while Ali had to control several capitals. Of them he preferred Medina, to the continual annoyance of the people of Kufa and Basra, who frequently instigated rebellions either from jealousy or malice.

meditation. In later life, after the death of the Holy Prophet, he turned more and more to prayer for solace and support, living the life of a recluse. This alienated him still further from the chiefs and magnates who revelled in the empty amusements and coarse wit that Ali abhorred.

It was inevitable that the secular interests of his pleasure-loving subjects should clash with the spiritual wishes of Ali, whereas at the court of Mu'awiya the chiefs could escape from austerity to a world of luxury and sensuous pleasure.

### (g) **Ali's Honesty**

Ali's attempts scrupulously to follow the injunctions of the Holy Qur'an resulted in his refusing to employ any diplomatic wiles in his negotiations with Mu'awiya or to disseminate any kind of lying propaganda in his attempts to win over the provinces to his cause. His straightforward tactics and his belief that the unvarnished truth ought to be enough for anybody were ill-suited to the needs of his people who were more willing to respect the devious and wily strategy of Mu'awiya.

Ali's treatment of his enemies was particularly magnanimous but his forbearance was misinterpreted as weakness. Whereas Ali went by the Qur'anic laws, Mu'awiya poisoned, mutilated and tortured his enemies thereby winning respect through fear.

One of the defects of Ali's character was that he was not content to be merely honest, he had to ram his honesty down other people's throats. All his defects were, as it were, defects of his virtues but they served to isolate him still further from his fellows. They found him almost too perfect.

### (h) **Ali's Ideas Ahead of his Time**

Ali's intellectual powers were far ahead of his time. The concepts which he had grasped are still staggeringly new to many people in the world today and it is therefore small wonder that the illiterate masses of Arabia

in the seventh century, could not even begin to understand the lofty ideals which he expounded. Ali, accustomed as a military leader to rapid victories, and impatient and intolerant by temperament, did not realise how slowly the human mind advances. Militating against the success of his ideals was also the fact that he had succeeded to the Calliphate during a time of disillusionment, degeneration and dissipation. For the gloomy, frustrated people over whom he ruled, the time was not yet ripe for a spiritual revival. After the heavy casualties of the civil war they wanted only to be left alone to lick their wounds and to try and restore the better standard of living to which they had become accustomed during the days of the early Islamic victories. What did they care about pan-Islamic ideals and World States and the kingdom of God on earth? Ali's voice called to them to the light but they turned a deaf ear to his pleas, preferring to remain in the spiritual darkness which finally overwhelmed them.

### SOME OPINIONS ABOUT ALI

The character of Ali is one which has exercised a peculiar fascination over many distinguished scholars, some of whose assessments are given below:—

#### **John. J. Pool on Ali<sup>1</sup>**

John. J. Pool laments the death of Ali as follows:—

"The fact is he (Ali) was too mild a man for the stirring times in which he lived. He was too slow in resolve, and too undecided in action. At any time he preferred compromise and delay to energy and promptness, and with fatal results..."

"The death of Ali was an epoch-making event. We come now to the parting of ways. Henceforward the Commanders of the Faithful ceased to be elected by the votes of the people of Medina or Mecca. Arabia was

1. John. J. Pool. *Studies in Mohammadanism*. p. 61-62.

no longer to be the seat of temporal power. For the future, in Islam might was to take the place of right. And the spiritual power also underwent a change."

### **Gibbon<sup>1</sup> on Ali**

Gibbon sees Ali's main defect as one of rashness, rather than of caution.

"A tumultuous anarchy of five days (after the martyrdom of Uthman) was appeased by the inauguration of Ali, his refusal would have provoked a general massacre. In this painful situation he supported the becoming pride of the chief of the Hashimites; declared that he had rather serve than reign, rebuked the presumption of the strangers, and required the formal, if not the voluntary, assent of the chiefs of the nation.

He has never been accused of promoting the assassination of Uthman; though Persia indiscretely celebrates the festivals of that holy martyr. The quarrel between Uthman and his subjects was assuaged by the early mediation of Ali, and Hasan, the eldest of his sons, was insulted and wounded in the defence of the Caliph..."

"A life of prayer and contemplation had not chilled the martial activity of Ali, but in a mature age, after a long experience of mankind, he still betrayed in his conduct the rashness and indiscretion of youth."

### **Impatience the Chief Trait of Ali's Character**

It will be thus clear that impatience, rather than caution, is more frequently attributed to Ali, along with an almost pathological inability to make decisions when he was in a state of depression. Indecision and impatience are not mutually exclusive although caution and rashness would appear to be contradictory elements and unlikely to be found in the same person. It is also important for the reader to distinguish between Ali, the

1. Edward Gibbon. *Decline & Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. III, p. 521, Publishers Frederick Warne & Co. London.

hot-headed boy in the household of the holy Prophet and Ali the mature recluse.

### **Hitti on Ali<sup>1</sup>**

Philip Hitti draws attention to the tremendous influence exerted by Ali after his death, in contrast with his somewhat ineffectual reign.

"Valiant in battle, wise in counsel, eloquent in speech, true to his friends, magnanimous to his foes, Ali became both the paragon of Muslim nobility and chivalry (*futuwwah*) and the Solomon of Arabic tradition, around whose name poems, proverbs, sermonettes and anecdotes innumerable have clustered. He had a swarthy complexion, large black eyes, bald head, thick and long white beard, and was corpulent and of medium stature. His sabre "*Dhul Faqr*" (the cleaver of vertebrae), wilded by the Prophet on the memorable battle-field of Badr, has been immortalised in the words of the verse found engraved on many medieval Arab swords: "*La sayfa illa Dhu-al-Faqr wa la fata illa Ali.*" "No sword can match *Dhul-al-Faqr*, and no young warrior can compare with Ali." The later Fityan movement which developed ceremonies and insignia savouring of medieval European Chivalry and the modern scout movements, took Ali for its *Fata* and model. Regarded as wise and brave by all the Islamic world, as idealistic and exemplary by many Fityan and dervish fraternities, as sinless and infallible by his partisans, and ever held to be the incarnation of the deity by the Ghulah (extremists) among them, he whose worldly career was practically a failure, has continued to exert a posthumous influence second only to that of the Holy Prophet himself. The throngs of pilgrims that still stream to his Mashhad at Najf and to that of his son al-Hussain, the Shia arch-saint and martyr at nearby Karbala, and the passion play enacted annually

1. Philip. K. Hitti. *History of the Arabs*, p. 183. Publishers Macmillan & Co. Edition 1949.

on the tenth of Muharram throughout the Shia world testify to the possibility that death may avail a Messiah more than life."

### **Syed Ameer Ali<sup>1</sup> on Ali**

Syed Ameer Ali belonging to the Shi'ite sect, looks on Ali as "the foremost of Muslims":—

"Mild, beneficent, and humane, ready to help the weak and distressed his life had been devoted to the cause of Islam. Had he possessed the sternness of Umar's character he would have been more successful in governing an unruly race like the Arabs. But his forbearance and magnanimity were misunderstood, and his humanity and love of truth was turned by his enemies to their own advantage..."

"Ali is described as a man of ruddy complexion, not very tall but extremely strong, inclined to stoutness, with a flowing beard, soft grey eyes, and a look of great amiability and kindness. His bravery had won him the title of the "Lion of God", his learning that of the "Gate of Knowledge." Chivalrous, humane, and forbearing to the verge of weakness, as a ruler he came before his time. Most of the grand undertakings initiated by Umar for the welfare of the people were due to his counsel. Ever ready to succour the weak and to redress the wrongs of the injured, the accounts of his valorous deeds are recited with enthusiasm from the bazars of Cairo to those of Delhi. How the mail-clad knight rescued a stranger beset by lions in the desert; how the poor woman, captured by brigands with her wounded and dying husband, wailed for the succour which never failed, and how the "Lion of God" appeared and saved them, such stories bring back to Arab life the chivalry of the Arabs—personified in their greatest hero. With his dying breath he inculcated lessons of charity, love, humility and self-abnegation to

1. Syed Ameer Ali. *A short history of the Saracens*, p. 52. Publishers Macmillan & Co. Ed. 1951.

his sons. He expressly ordered that no harshness should be used towards his murderer, who should be executed with one blow. In summing up his worth, Masudi says—"If the glorious name of being the first of the Muslims, a comrade of the Prophet in exile, his faithful companion in the struggle for the faith, his intimate associate in life, and his kinsman, if a true knowledge of the spirit of his teachings and of the Book; if self-abnegation and practice of justice; if honesty purity and love of truth; if a knowledge of law and science, constitutes a claim to pre-eminence, then all must regard Ali as the foremost of Muslims. We shall search in vain to find, either among his predecessors (save one) or among his successors, those virtues with which God had endowed him."

### **Sir William Muir<sup>1</sup> on Ali**

Sir William Muir was a great admirer of Ali who says:—

"In the character of Ali, there are many things to commend. Mild and beneficent, he treated al-Basra, when prostrate at his feet, with a generous forbearance. Towards theocratic fanatics, who wearied his patience by incessant intrigues and insensate rebellion, he showed no vindictiveness. Excepting Mu'awiya, the man of all others whom he ought not to have estranged, he carried the policy of conciliating his enemies to a dangerous extreme. In compromise, indeed, and in procrastination lay the failure of his caliphate. With greater vigour, spirit and determination, he might have averted the schism which for a time threatened the existence of Islam, and which has never ceased to weaken it."

"Ali was wise in counsel, and many an adage and sapient proverb has been attributed to him. But like Solomon, his wisdom was for others than himself."

1. Sir William Muir. *The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline and Fall*  
p. 288.

**Encyclopaedia Britannica on Ali**

In this immortal work, Ali is described as a bold, noble and generous man, "The last and worthiest of the primitive Muslims, who imbibed his religious enthusiasm from companionship with the Prophet himself, and who followed to the last the simplicity of his example."

**Charles Mills<sup>1</sup> on Ali**

"As the chief of the family of Hashim, and as the cousin and son-in-law of him whom the Arabians respected almost to idolatry, it is apparently incredible that Ali was not raised to the Caliphate immediately on the death of Muhammad. To the advantage of his birth and marriage, was added the friendship of the Prophet. The son of Abu Talib was one of the first converts to Islam and Muhammad's favourite appellation of him was, the Aaron of a second Moses. His talents as an orator, and his intrepidity as a warrior, commended him to a nation in whose judgment courage was virtue and eloquence was wisdom. But the pride and loftiness of his spirit endured not the caution inseparable from schemes of policy, and continually precipitated him into rashness. His opposition to Abu Bakr would not have ceased, if Fatima had lived; but on her death, six months after that of her father, the companions of Muhammad relaxed in their friendship to his family. In the reigns of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, a dignified independence was preserved by Ali. On the invitation of the Caliphs, he assisted in the councils at Medina, but he was principally occupied in the tranquil pursuits of domestic life, and the various duties of his religion. On the murder of Uthman, the Egyptians, who were at Medina, offered him the Caliphate. Indignant that the power of nomination should be usurped by the strangers, Ali declared that the Suffrages of the inhabitants of Mecca and Medina alone

1. Charles Mills, *A history of Muhammadanism* p. 84.

could be available. The public voice soon echoed the opinion of the murderers, and the scruples of Ali were soon removed. In apprehension of the enmity of Ayesha, his relentless foe, and of the whole family of Mu'awiya he declined to receive in private the proffered allegiance of the chiefs. With his accustomed simplicity, he preceeded to the Mosque clad in a cotton gown, a coarse turban on his head, his slippers were in one hand, and a bow, instead of a staff, occupied the other."

### **Professor Nicholson<sup>1</sup> on the character of Ali**

Professor Nicholson, like Hitti, emphasises the extent of Ali's posthumous influence:—

"He (Ali) was a gallant warrior, a wise counsellor, a true friend and a generous foe. He excelled in poetry and in eloquence; his verses and sayings are famous throughout the Muhammadan East though few of them can be considered authentic. A fine spirit worthy to be compared with Mantrose and Bayard, he had no talent for the stern realities of State-craft, and was over-matched by unscrupulous rivals who knew that "War is a game of deceit." Thus his career was in one sense a failure: his authority as Caliph was never admitted, while he lived, by the whole community. On the other hand, he has exerted, down to the present day, a posthumous influence only second to that of Muhammad himself. Within a century of his death he came to be regarded as the Prophet's successor **JURE DIVINO**: as a blessed martyr, sinless and infallible; and by some even as an incarnation of God. The Ali of Shi'ite legend is not an historical figure glorified: rather does he symbolise, in purely mythical fashion the religious aspirations and political aims of a large section of the Muslim world."

1. Professor R.A. Nicholson. *A literary History of the Arabs*. p. 191. Publishers. The Cambridge University Press. Edition 1953.

**Dr. Andrew Crichton<sup>1</sup> on Ali**

"This prince united the qualifications of a poet, an orator, and a soldier, for he was the bravest and most eloquent man in his dominions. A monument of his wisdom still remains in a collection of precepts or sentences of which 169 have been translated by Ockley. Many other maxims and poems have been ascribed to him, but some hesitation must be allowed in fixing their authorship. The eulogies of his partisans are fulsome and extravagant; "the king of men, the lion of God, the distributor of light and graces", are among the epithets which their adoration has conferred on him. During the Caliphate of the house of Ummayyad, the place of his interment was kept concealed. In the fourth age of the Hejira, when the Abbasid ascended the Muslim throne, it was discovered, and a tomb, a temple and a city arose on the spot, known in modern times by the name of Mashid Ali, five or six miles from the ruins of Kufa and 120 to the south of Baghdad. The monarchs of Persia have enriched it with a succession of spoils and thousands of Shias pay their homage."

Dr. Crichton also describes Ali's prowess at the battle of Siffin in the following words:—

"Ninety actions or skirmishes are recorded to have taken place; and in these the humanity of Ali was as conspicuous as his valour. He strictly enjoined his troops invariably to await the first onset of the enemy, to spare the fugitives, and respect the virtues of female captives. Not a day passed in which he displayed not some extraordinary feat of personal strength and skill. The bravest leaders of the Syrian host fell in succession by the single prowess of his resistless arm—"For death itself dwelt on the point of his spear, and perdition in the hilt of the sword." "The hideous and gigantic Kerreib, who could obliterate with his thumb the impression of a silver coin, he cleft at one stroke from the crest to the

1. Dr. Andrew Crichton. *History of Arabia and its people*. p. 307.  
Publishers Nelsons & Sons. London. Ed. 1852.

saddle-bow. Two warriors attacked him in disguise, but with a sweep of his double scimitar he bisceted the foremost through the middle with such rapidity and precision that the rider remained fixed on the saddle; the spectators concluding he had missed his blow, until the motion of the horse threw the body in halves to the ground."

### **Carlyle<sup>1</sup> on Ali**

"As for this young Ali, one cannot but like him. A noble minded creature, as he shows himself, now and always afterwards; full of affection, of fiery daring. Something chivalrous in him, brave as a lion, yet with a grace, a truth and affection worthy of Christian knight-hood. He died by assassination in the Mosque at Kufa, a death occasioned by his own generous fairness, confidence in the fairness of others: he said, If the wound proved not unto death they must pardon the Assassin, but if it did, then must slay him straightway, so that they two in the same hour might appear before God, and see which side of that quarrel was the just one."

### **Dr. Henry Stubbe<sup>2</sup> on Ali**

"Ali was of a brown complexion, a little man with a belly somewhat large, he had a contempt of the world, its glory and pomp, he feared God much, gave many alms, was just in all his actions, humble and affable; of an exceeding quick wit, and of an ingenuity that was not common, he was exceedingly learned, not only in those sciences that terminate in speculation, but those which extend to practice."

### **Major Price<sup>3</sup> on Ali**

"His (Ali's) virtues and extraordinary qualifications

1. Thomas Carlyle. *On Heroes and Hero worship and the Heroic in History*, p. 77.

2. Dr. Henry Stubbe. *An account of the rise and progress of Mahometanism*. p. 83. Publishers Orientalia, Lahore. Ed. 1954.

3. Major David Price. *Memoirs of the Principal events of Muhammadan History* p. 363, Publishers Hurrt Rec. orme & Brown. London 1811.

have been the subject of voluminous panegyric, and his war-like exploits from his youth upwards have been particularly celebrated in the *Khawer Namah*, a poem well known in the East, and which may, perhaps contend in extravagance with the wildest effusions of European romance. With his acknowledged talents and magnanimity, it is, however, difficult to account for the train of civil mischief and perpetual discontent, which continued to disturb him through the whole of his reign. His gallant spirit was probably incapable of bending to the ordinary shifts of political craft, and it is perhaps true, that the Arabian chiefs were not yet sufficiently disciplined to see the sovereign authority quietly monopolised by any particular family."

### **The History of the Arabs<sup>1</sup>**

"As to his person, Ali had a veay red face, large eyes, a prominent belly, a large beard, a hairy breast, and a very swarthy complexion. He was rather short than middle sized, of a youthful, florid and frequently smiling countenance. Some, however, write that he had hair on his head, which was not very grey but formed into curls. With regard to his disposition, this Caliph, if we will believe the Muslim writers, had the fear of God constantly before his eyes, was extremely charitable, just, humble and a strenuous defender of what they call the true religion. He was also very acute, learned, and extremely well-versed in all useful art and sciences. His bravery never failed him, nor was he more eminent and conspicuous for that, than for his liberality and munificence, as well as that sweetness of temper which so remarkably distinguished him on all occasions."

1. The modern part of an universal History. Vol. II Publishers S. Ric T. Osborne, C. Hitch, A. Miller and John Rimington.

**PART III**  
**ALI THE SUPERMAN**

## CHAPTER XX

# ALI THE SUPERMAN

### **Ali Born From a Particle of Divine Light**

Ali's partisans have depicted him as a superman possessed of miraculous powers much like those attributed by the Christians to Jesus Christ. They have rounded out the sparse facts of his biography with fanciful and supernatural explanations and created legends and myths which obscure his real personality. They extol him both as warrior and as saint and see him as the hero of heroes, possessed of quasi-divine powers and unable to make a wrong decision. Some of the Shi'ite traditions go so far as to allege that whatever Ali said or did was the outcome of God's commandment for had not Ali been created from a particle of divinity. According to these sources, Ali was created by God before the creation of heaven and earth, from a particle of that same divine light which was breathed into the sacred person of Muhammad (may peace be upon him). Even the most sophisticated Shi'ite writers allow their imagination free rein when recounting the miraculous happenings with which the story of Ali's life is studded and with which the Shi'ite creed attempts to make its theology more attractive. Although myth is not an integral part of the Shi'ite creed, its theology is nevertheless permeated with legends and miracles many of which have also become imperceptibly and inseparably blended with Islamic theology as a whole.

On the other hand, Ali's detractors will allow nothing good in him. Far from considering him as a qu

divine figure, they see him as a human being who was liable to err like others. The truth about Ali lies somewhere between these two extremes and it is the purpose of this third book to try and discover it and arrive at a reasonable assessment of Ali's character and abilities. In order to do this it is necessary first to consider and sift some of the legends adhering to his name.

### **Ali's Advent Foretold in the Scriptures**

A multiplicity of Shi'ite legends look upon Ali as the pro-genitor of the "twelve princes" from the "loins of Ismael", as foretold in the book of Genesis. According to the Shias, after the creation of the world, God sent his prophets to illumne mankind, the most auspicious of these being Abraham. In response to a prayer to God, asking for a blessing, Abraham is said to have received the answer: "Sarah, thy wife shall bear thee a son and thou shall call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him. And as for Ishmael I have heard thee: behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly, twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." (Genesis 18: 19-20)

The twelve princes referred to in this prophecy are interpreted by the Shias as the twelve Imams who were born from the loins of Ali, who drew his lineage from Ishmael, as foretold by God.

### **The Various Appellations**

Thus, specially created by God and displaying divine traits of character, Ali is considered a semi-divine person on whom the Shias have bestowed many sonorous appellations, some of which they invoke in prayers. The following appellations are those most generally added to Ali's name: "Moula" (master), "Murtaza" (he in whom God is well pleased), "Haidar" (the lion),

“Wali Allah” (friend of God), “Haidar-i-Karrar” (the impetuous lion), “Asad Allah al-Ghaib” (the victorious lion of God), “Sher-i-Yazdan” (the lion of God), “Moula Mushkkil-Kusha” (the master who solves the difficulties of others), “Shah-i-Awliya” (the king of saints), “Shah-i-Wilayat” (the king of the pious), “Abul Rehanateen” (the father of followers), “Abul Sibtayan” (the father of Hasan and Hussain, who are the leaders of the youths of paradise), “Amin-ul-Momaneen” (trustee of the faithful), “Imam-ul-Mutakeen” (leader of the holies), “Sayyid-ul-Sadiqueen” (pontif of the upright), “Sayyid-ul-Muslameen” (chosen leader of the Muslims), “Sayyid-ul-Momaneen” (master of the believers-in-faith), “Sayyid-ul-Arab” (master of the Arabs), “Sayyid-ul-Fi’d Dunya wa Akharat” master of the world and the hereafter), “Sadiq-ul-Akbar” (the great truthful one), “Farooq-ul-Azim” (the great discriminator between truth and falsehood), “Khatum-ul-Wassayian” (the seal of testators), “Amir-ul-Momaneen” (the commander of the faithful), “al-Wasi” (the testamentor), “al-Hadi” (the guide), “Salah-ul-Momaneen” the reformer of the faithful), “Khair-ul-Bashr” (the best of the creation), “Al-Abid” (the pious), “Al-Zahid” (the chaste), and “Abu Turrab” (the father of earth), because Ali was allegedly gifted with the power of conversing with the earth).

“Why should not Ali illumine the earth?” say the Shi’ite traditions, “was he not born of the divine light that shone in God’s sanctuary of the Kab’ah, was he not brought up in infancy by the Holy Prophet himself, adopted by him as a son and given his daughter in marriage? Did not the Holy Prophet impart divine knowledge to him? And, on attaining manhood, did not Ali stand by God’s Apostle, risking all dangers for him, fighting all his battles and displaying such unflinching fidelity that his name became synonymous with loyalty and faithfulness.”

### **Ali’s Valour**

In Shi’ite legends, Ali is depicted as the embodiment

of chivalry, courage, intrepidity, as a man of such bravery that he must assuredly have been possessed of super-human powers. From ascribing such powers to him to surrounding his very creditable human prowess with super-natural explanations—is but a short step. That he was a superb warrior is undeniable and at his best in single combat. If Masudi is to be believed Ali, even in later life, was able to kill 523 men in one day, at the battle of Siffin, while in his whole lifetime the traditions claim that he killed more than 10,000 men with his own hand. According to the Shi'ite sources, he is the personification of all military prowess, sent into the world to defend, and transplant, the faith by his famous sword, "Dhul-faqar" the renown of which is sung by the angels in heaven. In another operation Ali is said to have split an assailant in two with so perfect a blow that the two separate halves of the dead man remained seated in the saddle until the horse rolled over. On another occasion he is reported to have knocked down 33 assailants by merely extending his mighty arms. The fierceness and vigour of his attack, as he broke through the enemy lines time and time again, earned him the appellation "lion", while, at other times, his stubborn refusal to admit defeat, when defeat seemed inevitable, led his men to believe him imbued with divine powers. Ali's heroism at the "Battle of Ditch" led the Holy Prophet to say of it, "The attack led by Ali on that day far excelled the paryaers offered by both the worlds." The astounding feat of strength which he showed at the battle of Khyber, when he tore the great gates of the fortress off their hinges, led the chroniclers to depict him as "Standing on air" and as "resting his feet on the wings of the angel Gabriel" while the whole citadel shook to its foundation. Because all these wars were fought in the name of God, and because Ali survived so many combats, it was not difficult to deduce that God had sent his angels to protect him.

A whole crop of miracles has grown up around Ali's campaigns. The finding of water under the stone in

the desert on the way to the battle of Siffin has been discussed in Book II. A further and unnecessary embroidery to this story is that after the men had drunk their fill Ali replaced the stone and the source of the water disappeared miraculously and mysteriously.

Other stories tell of Ali's power over the animal kingdom. On one of his marches, for example a lioness with her cubs is said to have barred the path ahead, greatly to the perturbation of the soldiers. Ali, unafraid, is reported as having whistled to the beast which wagged its tail and lay like a lamb prostrate on the ground before him. The animal, in token of homage to Ali, came forward and began to lick the Caliph's feet. Such stories, passing from mouth to mouth gained new details in each re-telling until, by the time they came to be chronicled, the original facts have become almost entirely overlaid, even unrecognisably distorted.

### **Ali's Clairvoyance**

Another attribute which Ali allegedly possessed was that of clairvoyance, a psychic ability to know what was going on in another place. To this, legend adds the ability to be bodily as well as spiritually transported to another place.

One day, when Ali was at Medina, the Holy Prophet's bosom companion, the Salman Farsi, lay dying many hundreds of miles away at Medi'an in Persia. Salman was a notable convert to Islam, whose piety and chastity had become proverbial. Informed by a divine injunction that the old man was nearing his end, Ali told his companions to shut their eyes and walk a few paces. On opening their eyes they are said to have found themselves miraculously transported to the house of Salman, where Ali performed the funeral rites. They were then returned to Medina in the same supernatural way, as they had gone to Persia.

To the incredulous the fact that "Medi'an" and Medina are made up of the same letters suggests a con-

fusion of records as a more probable explanation of this miracle of transportation. The fact that Ali was aware that Salman lay dying is less susceptible either of proof or disproof.

### **Ali's Piety**

When Ali offered his prayers he was frequently observed to be in a strange physical condition. When asked to account for pallor of his face and the way in which his body trembled he replied, "I present myself to the Almighty to render an account for the various obligations that devolve on me and I do not know whether I have discharged them dutifully by protecting the defenceless and aiding the oppressed." His humility before God was one of the reasons why he was regarded as a saint of saints. Another factor which made him exceptionally pious was the important part which he assigned to prayer in his daily life.

One day when the Holy Prophet was sleeping with his head in Ali's lap, the time of "Usur" (afternoon prayers) passed. Informed by divine revelation that he had caused Ali to miss his prayers, the Holy Prophet is reported to have said, "Verily, Ali was busy in the service of God and His Apostle. O Lord! Command thy Sun not to set yet and to come back into the world again so as to enable Ali to perform the prayers." The Sun is said to have re-appeared forthwith in the world and to have shed its rays until Ali had finished his prayers.

In one of his many battles Ali is said to have been pierced by a piece of an arrow, which could not be extracted and which caused him great pain for many months. One day, while Ali was holding communion with God, he went into a state of reverie and on emerging from this state of trance he found that the arrow had come out of its own accord, through the intercession of divine favours.

Without doubt Ali was an ascetic and a genuine Sufi

to the boot, so overawed by the fear of God that he was often found unconscious on his prayer-mat from shame and remorse at his own unworthiness. He gave himself, body and soul, to the love of God and the people believed that, only to look upon his face, wet with tears as he prayed, was equivalent of offering up the greatest of prayers on their own behalf.

Because Ali was considered to be the most pious and most holy of all the believers in faith, the people also began to feel that God must have rewarded him by granting him the power to perform miracles. Tales abound of miraculous happenings. A withered tree grew again at Ali's touch; pebbles turned into pieces of gold at his command, so that a believer in faith could find money to pay back a Jewish usurer; stories such as these appear again and again in the Shi'ite chronicles. Professor Lane-Poole<sup>1</sup> offers an explanation of the growth of these and other Shi'ite traditions, which cluster around not Ali but also his descendants, the Imams, as well.

"One may indeed fairly admire the many fine qualities of Ali" says Lane-Poole, "and deplore the butchering of his family (i.e. the martyrdom of Hussain at the field of Kerbala), but to go further and insist on the marvellous virtues of the whole household and the indefeasible divine right of Ali and his descendants to the throne of Islam is extravagance. The divine right resolves itself, as we have seen into a popular vote, and even the virtues of the family do not bear very close inspection."

Going on to discuss the development of Shiaism as a separate cult, Professor Lane-Poole observes:—

"Round a simple story of rival factions, impotent claims and cruel suppression, has grown up a wonderful crop of fables, by which the whole family of Ali and especially of Ali's son (Hussain) have been credited with qualities almost divine."

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Lane-Poole. *Studies in a Mosque* p. 217-219.

**The Legends of the Taziyas (Passion Plays).**

Nowhere is the power of myth-making more apparent than in the "Taziyas" or 'Passion Plays' which re-tell the tragedy of the martyrdom of Ali's son Hussain at the battlefield of Kerbala. Every year, at the time of Moharram, the Shias re-act the tale of Hussain's martyrdom and these plays prove a most effective means of keeping alive the sentiments and enthusiasm of the people belonging to the Shia sect; and also, unfortunately, of inciting their wrath against the persecutors of Hussain, by tradition, the Sunnites.

Professor Lane-Poole further goes on to say, "Unable to believe, that their Imam was conquered and killed against his will, the Shias have made the whole tragedy (of Kerbala) a predestined case of vicarious sacrifice. Hussain is fore-told as a victim in the cause of Islam. "He shall die for the sake of my people" says Muhammad, of his grandson, according to these legends, and the passion play" (Tazoyas) is full of allusions to Hussain's redemptive work and voluntary sacrifice of his body for the sins of the Muslim world. Hussain himself knows when only a child, the destiny that lies before him. "All the rational creatures" he says, "men and Jinn, who inhabit the present and the future world, are sunk in sin, and have but one Hussain to save them"; and when Ali speaks mournfully of the woes that shall happen to his family, Hussain answers, "Father, there is no occasion to call these things a trial, since all refer to the salvation of our sinful followers. Thou, Hasan, and I, together with my mother the Virgin, will accept sufferings according to the best of our ability". Standing by the grave of Muhammad, before departing on the fatal journey to Kerbala, Hussain says, "How can I forget thy people, since I am going to offer myself voluntarily for their sakes? And Muhammad tells him he has taken off from his heart the burden of grief he had for the future state of mankind; and Hussain departs with this speech, which

savours of Sufism; "I have found behind this veil what my heart has sought after for years. Now I am made free. I have washed my hands of life. I have guided myself to do the will of God." And so throughout the journey (to Kerbala) and on the field of battle he and all those about him are continually referring to this voluntary expiation of the sins of his people; and he dies with this thought and, in meek compliance with the will of God and is certain that he will awake at the Resurrection with the intercessory power he has purchased with his blood.'

"Without the introduction of this important element of self-sacrifice to idealise the character of Hussain, the unvarnished tale might not call forth the intense sympathy with which it is received among the Shias. When Hussain has been presented as a self-renouncing redeemer of men and his sufferings voluntarily undergone out of love for mankind, the tragedy wears a new interest and gains a wider influence. The Persian sects have always shown a leaning towards asceticism and the renouncing of self—or what they fancied such—and this sacrifice of Hussain immediately appealed to their predisposition. But more than this, the story of a life surrendered for others' sake, the sad devotedness of Hussain, stir a feeling that exists in every heart—a certain admiration for self-denial which the most selfish men feel—a sort of worship for high ideals of conduct which has a corner in the most unromantic heart. It is the sorrowful resignedness, the willing yet tortured self-dedication of the martyr that touches. One may see in it a Christian side of Islam. In the dry severity of the Arabian faith there is too little of the self-gaining love which renounces all even life itself, for the sake of others. There is more of the stiffnecked pharisaical pride which holds up its righteous head on its assured way to the pleasure of paradise. The death of Hussain, as idealised by after ages, fills up this want in Islam; it is the womanly as against the masculine, the Christian as opposed to the Jewish element that the story supplies to

the religion of Muhammad."

Year in and year out, these plays have drawn tears to the eyes of the people who, smitting their breasts with their hands and throwing dust on their beards, provide a chorus of mourners to the tragic drama. Rhythmically uttering "Ya Hussain, Ya Hussain" they bewail the martyrdom of the holy Alid family. Elegies are recited which spare no graphic detail of the murders, describing in verse after verse the body of Hussain lying pierced with arrows, the blood gushing out from the myriad wounds, the headless corpse of Ali Akbar, the bleeding body of the dead Qasim, and Abbas with his hands lopped bloodily off, the rope binding Zaynib as a prisoner, the handcuffs that fetter the sickly Zayn-al-A'bidin, the agonies of the youngster Ali Asghar who is to die of thirst. The facts of history and the sentiments of poetic drama thus become blended in an inseparable way to form the first fundamentals of the Shi'ite creed.

The fact that it was Ali's son who was chosen to be the martyr throws a retrospective light of extreme sanctity upon Ali, thus enhancing the reputation for piety and semi-divinity which he himself had enjoyed.

### **Ali an Authority on the Scriptures**

Leaving the realms of tragic and elegaic poetry for the realms of fact, we now turn to Ali's prowess in the intellectual field. There seems to be little doubt that he was one of the great brains of his age and this coupled with his unique relationship with the Holy Prophet, made him an authority on the Scriptures.

Records show him to be well acquainted with both the Old and New Testaments, which he applied frequently when trying Jews, and Christians judiciously. He was similarly well-versed in the Qur'an, the fountain-head of the teachings of Islam. The Shia theologians assert that the prerogative of interpreting the Qur'an could only be entrusted to a learned scholar of divine choosing and that Ali's commentaries on the

Holy Book are the only authoritative ones.

One great virtue of Ali's commentaries is that, despite his extreme intellectualism, he employed the language of the common man, using everyday phraseology and imagery such as could be understood by the layman. On the other hand much of his personal contribution to Islamic theology was abstract and speculative. His commentaries gave a new conception and strength to Islamic dogma, for which they formed a doctrinal basis; on the other hand it was his expositions which transformed Islam into a practical code for everyday living. Henceforth Islam ceased to be a mere collection of beliefs and formulae but the name given to the principles of life. As an intimate of the Prophet he knew at what time and under what circumstances each Surah of the Holy Qur'an had been revealed and to the work of the Holy Prophet he was able to add eloquent and illuminating adornments and explanations. His legal knowledge was also most useful in the exposition of the Quran'ic laws.

It was his knowledge of these laws which made him refuse to agree to the Kharajite slogan "the kingdom and decision belong to God alone". Ali would not negotiate with the rebels, recognising a seditious purpose behind their quasi-religious sentiments. Instead, he assembled the leading scholars of the Qur'an and said to them, "Has not the Qur'an ordained that a judge be appointed to act as arbiter in the case of differences between a husband and a wife: then how can it be that at the occurrence of a rift between the ranks of Islam and its followers, God can withhold the appointment of arbiters? Is the position of a nation of less importance than of an individual couple? How can a matter of such magnitude be left unattended by God?"

"The Almighty God" say our annalists, "has collected all the Quran in the heart of Ali". According to the Shi'ite traditions the duty of the collection and codification of the Qur'an was entrusted to Ali.

**Ali as founder of the Science of Commentary**

The credit of founding the "Ilm-ul-Tafseer" or "the science of Commentary on the Qur'an also goes to Ali. The analysts unanimously declare that when any chapter or verse was revealed to the Holy Prophet he used to acquaint Ali with it and the latter then learnt it by heart. Thus intimately connected with the source of the Qur'an at first hand, Ali's expositions and interpretations were binding and authoritative. It was in imitation of Ali that later commentators promoted the exposition of the Qur'an into a regular science. The elaboration of the various doctrines and dogmas which have since enlightened the Muslims, was thus chiefly due to the incentive of Ali.

**Ali as Founder of the "Ilm-ul-Sunnah".**

Ali is regarded by the Shias as the originator of the "Ilm-ul-Sunnah" or the "Science of compilation of the Table-talks and practices of Muhammad". Whether on prayer-mat in a mosque or in the saddle on a battlefield, Ali from his infancy upto the death of the Holy Prophet, is said to have spent thirty years of his life in the closest association with the Apostle of God. As such Ali was the chief and most reliable source and authority on the "Sunnah" which after the Qur'an, are regarded as the secondary source of Islamic law. Because of the fact that, from amongst all the companions of the Prophet, Ali survived Muhammad (may peace be upon him) for another thirty years, he was therefore the most reliable repository of such utterances. Ali is alleged to have transmitted 586 Hadithes practically all of which have been unanimously accepted as authoritative by all the sects of Islam, especially by the chief Sunni Muslim chroniclers.

**Ali as the Founder of Islamic Jurisprudence**

Ali is unanimously acclaimed as an authority on the

"Fiqah" (jurisprudence) and "Ijtihad" (Research) into Islamic law. He had attained such a fame by virtue of his mastery over these, that renowned personalities like Umar the Great, and Ayesha used to seek his advice on different and difficult questions of law. Even Ali's bitterest enemies, including none other than Mu'awiya used to refer to his findings on difficult problems relating to doctrines and dogmas and sought decisions on them. For attaining an understanding in Islamic jurisprudence, mastery over the Qur'an and the "Hadithes" was essential, along with a keen mind, intellectual development, breadth of vision and cool judgment—qualities so necessary for research which Ali possessed to a remarkable degree. The acute mind of Ali could deeply penetrate into the most difficult riddles and solve them with the greatest ease and facility. A number of Ali's judgments have been recorded and all display uncommon wisdom and versatility.

### **Ali as an Authority on "Ilm-ul-Kalam"**

Ali was also held as an authority on "Ilm-ul-Kalam" or the science of theology. His exposition of the doctrine of "Tauheed" or 'The Unity of God', justice, prophethood and Imamate etc, have passed into classic and the last word for the believers-in-faith.

### **Ali as the Father of Sufism**

It has been customary for the Sufis to represent Ali as the precursor of Sufism. This is true to a degree but it should be false to allege that Ali protested against the doctrine of Shari'a. Ali was a traditionalist, where the Sufis, because of the disintegrating effect of semi-mythical speculation and innovations, finally broke away from the Shari'a.

The Muslim Sufis, who are today divided in innumerable sects, were initially divided into only major sects, (a) the Junaidiyya, founded by Syed-

Tai'fa Junyad Baghdadi, and (b) the Tufuriya founded by Bayazid Bustami: both of these acknowledged Ali as the father of their sects.

### **Ali as an Encyclopaedia of Knowledge**

Ali was regarded as a living encyclopaedia, as knowledge personified drawing his learning direct from the Holy Prophet, who in turn had received it direct from God. Thus Ali's knowledge was considered to be of divine origin. To learn was so natural for him that its love had almost become instinctive in his character. Just as a young fish knows how to swim from its very birth so was Ali imbued with virtue from birth. Sent by God specifically to enlighten the world, his commentaries, his theological speculations, ceremonial prayers, his pronouncements on social laws and ethics, could not fail to enlighten mankind. The Holy Prophet used to say, "If I am the city of knowledge, verily Ali is the gate of it by which people can enter that city." On another occasion the Prophet said, "Of my followers, Ali surpasses all in the possession of knowledge. Wisdom and knowledge have been divided into ten parts, one part being given to the entire world while Ali alone possesses the other nine"; still again on another occasion, the Prophet remarked, "the relationship of my other companions to Ali in matters of knowledge, is that of a single drop to a mighty ocean."

Ali used to say that the Holy Prophet never failed to answer his questions and that, if he remained silent, the Apostle of God, used to insist on his entering into a discussion with him so that he might learn still further. At one of the gatherings of the Medinite Ansar and the Meccan Muhajirs, Ali said, "My inner self is so full of knowledge that it is bursting forth to illumine others. Alas, there are few who could derive benefit from it. O ye men! Ask me any problems now, before death overtakes me. This is the knowledge which the Holy Prophet has imparted to me by his tongue from my

infancy. Mine is the knowledge which relates to the beginning and the end." Similarly, on another occasion, Ali claimed that he was familiar with the ways of heaven (celestial knowledge) rather than that of this earth (secular knowledge); although few people of his time can have known so much about the secular sciences.

### **Ali as Founder of the Science of Grammar**

Previous to Ali, the Arabic language, although rich in vocabulary and poetic imagery, had no grammar. Such few grammatical rules as there were had been transmitted orally, and variably, from one generation to another. Ali anxious to preserve the purity of language codified the rules of Arabic grammar and laid the foundation of the science of grammar.

### **Ali as the Father of Rhetoric**

Ali is said to have contributed greatly to the art of rhetoric. In his early days he was famous for the eloquence of his legal judgments and for his inspiring sermons, while the succinct brevity of his maxims is still much admired.

No one in the Arabic language is said to have excelled Ali in eloquence. At one time the holy Prophet remarked, "I was selected by God for prophethood and Ali was selected by him for his bravery and eloquence." Even the letters and orders that Ali issued in his capacity as Caliph, are preserved as treasure-mines of information, wisdom, sagacity, prudence and common-sense. He could discourse at a moment's notice on any subject that arose. For example, one day an Arab remarked that the vowel "Alif" or 'A' was the widest used letter in the Arabic tongue. Ali then delivered a long discourse in which he dilated on the use of this letter "tour de force" which is still considered a model of Arabic oratory today.

Ibn Abbas said he once heard Ali commenting on

first letter of the first verse of the Qur'an for a whole night without finishing the discourse and by the break of dawn he was still in full spate, like a stream flowing before a stormy ocean.

### **Ali as Calligrapher**

Ali's authorship will be discussed in some detail in a later chapter. Here the reader should note that his many works were written with superb penmanship and scholars from the farthest flung provinces of Arabia would go to Kufa just to admire the beauty of his calligraphy, the most admired of Arabian arts in those days and one of which he was acknowledged to be the greatest exponent.

### **Ali as Poet**

Ali was the founder of a new school of poetry in Arabic. Previous to him, the poets of Arabia had concentrated their attention on writing "Qasida"-verses extolling their rulers, long couplets in praise of their lofty descent full of sonorous genealogical details and fulsome accounts of their attributes. Another favourite kind of poem was the romantic ballad often a lascivious song in praise of the charms of the beloved. The chief object of the poet was to gain cheap popularity and the art of poetry was frequently debased for monetary gain. Ali, on the other hand, wrote verses which aimed at elevating the popular taste and improving the morals of the Arabs. In them he extolled the virtues of bravery, patriotism, generosity, kindness, service to humanity, love of one's fellow-men, humility, honesty and wisdom.

### **Ali as an Authority on Mathematics**

Ali, in his discourses stressed the need to acquire knowledge, especially in Mathematics. He was, him-

self, a great mathematician who solved many problems which were difficult of solution.

### **Ali as Master of the Science of Physics and Medicine**

Ali's encyclopaedic knowledge tackled some thorny problems of Physics. He discussed a wide range of subjects such as the nature of the earth, sky, mountains, water, air and even electricity.

Similarly he exhibited some mastery of the science of medicine and his lectures on medicine show him to have been remarkably proficient in this and other subjects.

### **Conclusion**

Ali was undoubtedly the greatest thinker and philosopher of Islam. Not only was he the acknowledged master of conventional, factual knowledge but, with his uncommon and versatile genius he speculated on the philosophical side of his religion. His approach to any subject was always from a consideration of the concrete to the abstract, from the common to the uncommon and that is why in his expositions he was able to carry the people along with him. His exposition of the doctrine of the "Qaza-o-Qadr" or "Predestination and Free Will" must serve as an example of the masterly way in which he was able to interpret a problem which had baffled the theologians of Judaism and Christianity. When asked as to the connotation of these terms Ali said "Qaza" signified submission to God's will and His commandments and therefore the avoidance of sin, while "Qadr" signified the ability to live an upright life and to perform such acts as may bring one nearer to God and therefore also to refrain from those things which displease the Almighty. Do not think that a man is simply a puppet in the hands of a pre-destined fate, for to hold such a view would be tantamount to attributing tyranny to God; and also do not hold that a man is an absolutely

free agent. Rather we are only furthered in our aim to please God at his discretion by divine help and grace. We transgress because of our neglect of His commandments and we please him when we allow them to help us act righteously.

Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, one of the greatest philosophers and commentators on Islamic theology says:—

“The chief reason why the minds of earthly mortals are disturbed by Ali’s knowledge is this, that his knowledge was not one which was obtained by tuition and learning but it was revealed and inspired; nay it was spiritual and divine “*Ilm-i-Ladunni*” or ‘the inspired knowledge’ which is only acquired by *Ahl-i-Nubuwwut*” (Apostles and Prophets) and “*Ahlul-i-Walyat*” (the testators of the prophets) as was the case with Khizar and Ali. The word “*Walayat*” constitutes universal trusteeship and thus Ali’s source of knowledge was from the divine inspiration.

Whether divine or human, the extent and perfection of Ali’s knowledge could hardly fail to evoke the admiration of the Muslims. It is small wonder that his colossal figure reaching to towering heights appeared enigmatic to people who began to regard him divine, in other words—a superman.





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## CHAPTER XXI

## ALI THE IDEAL MAN

**The Role of Great Men**

The great German philosopher Goethe once remarked, "The more civilised a person becomes, the more urgently he feels that he has a dual role to play in the world, the real and the ideal; and he sees in this feeling the foundation of all that is noble. This is greatly true of great men, whose spirit lives on in the minds of others, and after their bodily death their legacy of ideas often helps to mould men's lives. The picture of the great man thus perpetuated may become far removed from reality, it adopts as it were a life of its own, constantly mutated into ever new patterns, by the vicissitudes of history. Only gradually does the spiritual wealth of a great mind become fruitful: every new generation goes to school with him and learns to understand new aspects of his work, hitherto neglected, which have for them a special significance and thus shapes the great man's image in the light of its own experience."

Ali has meant many different things to many generations, each of whom has found something to inspire it out of all the diverse wealth of his mind. During his lifetime he was thought of primarily as a warrior fighting, at first, in the battles of God and later, for a decade, against schismatics like Mu'awiya. He was also respected for his knowledge and learning, and, in later years, many thought of him as a saint, but it was not until after his death that the effect which he had exercised over the ethical life of his time began to be appreciated.

Ali was the pioneer of a movement which aimed to re-juvenate the ethical life of the Muslims. Ali promulgated moral laws at a time when morality has been shaken to its foundations by Mu'awiya and other opportunists. The Arabs had begun to forsake the unity of Islam in favour of the old tribal laws of the "Days of Ignorance", a disintegration which Mu'awiya found favourable to his ambitions and which he never ceased to exploit. The whole aristocracy of the Quriash, especially the Umayyads, was anxious to see a reversion to the old feudal ways and they were all in league to destroy Ali, who continued to insist on the need for Islamic unity. It was an uphill struggle and one which had, not only theological implications, but political and social significance as well. Ali had to fight against the disintegrating social forces that were everywhere around him and attempt, almost single-handed to restore the religious polity of Islam.

That he succeeded as well as he did, was due to the moral earnestness of his own character and to the colossal store of spiritual knowledge from which he drew his strength. In subsequent ages his ethical pronouncements, which fell largely on deaf ears during his lifetime, were to have an invigorating and regenerating effect on the Islam he served so well. The influence of Ali was to continue to make itself felt long after his death and to re-create earnestness amongst the Believers. It still makes itself felt today.

### **Ali Dedicates his life to the Propagation of Truth**

A careful study of the biographies of great men reveals that they lived for a central idea and that their life work consisted of delivering that message to humanity. History tells us that, when such men met with obstacles in their path, the effect was to make them redouble their enthusiasm. The more opposition they had to overcome, the more determinedly they held aloft the torch of truth which burned with ever-increasing

brightness against the darkness that enveloped all other objects. Such single-minded zeal characterised the life of Ali, who bore his torch safely through a multitudinous throng of woes and enemies. It cannot be said that Ali thrived on difficulties and opposition for there is abundant evidence that they caused him much distress of heart and mind, but they never, at any time, caused him to deviate from the right or to give up hope. Where many another man would have become a wily intriguer or a fierce and bloody tyrant, Ali retained an insistent sincerity and a true gentleness of spirit. Where other believers might have lost faith, so many were the trials that beset him, Ali held fast to his belief in Islam and preserved a stoic resignation to God. The example of his saintly life, remarkable as it was for its sobriety, piety and continence, has since furnished an ethical code of behaviour for millions of Believers. Nor did he effect a reformation in Islamic thought by example alone. He consciously re-organised the religious doctrines and systematised them, clarifying by his commentaries the problems of Islamic jurisprudence, the Hadithes, and the Qur'an. Himself combating with the flesh and a host of evils, Ali dedicated his life to the propagation of Islamic truth. Through his superb personality, the ideals, for which he stood and which he embodied in his own saintly life, have continued to flow through Islam in a mighty stream.

### **The Genesis of Ethical Laws**

Before we may take up the discussion of ethical laws as promulgated by Ali, let us examine the genesis and connotation of these laws. The words "ethical" borrowed from the Greek and "moral" borrowed from the Latin connoted, according to the concept of Ali, that conduct which characterised (1) one's good behaviour towards one's self; and (2) towards other human beings. Thus Ali's interpretation of ethical laws involved a personal phenomena in which self-surrender, unpharisaical

devotion, and an acute sense of responsibility were the marks of solidarity with one's fellow beings. Ali quoted the examples of the Hebrew prophets of yore, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ and lastly Muhammad, all of whom had made it their life mission to create a brotherhood in human society. All of these prophets had continually stressed their belief that the main reason for man's creation on earth was that he might, through feelings of sympathy and responsibility, help to promote the general good.

The service of one's fellow human beings thus formed an integral part of Ali's exposition of Islam and his own example aimed at inculcating the virtue of service in the lives of others.

### **The Attitude of Previous Philosophers towards Universal Brotherhood**

Early philosophers in many countries had tackled this thorny problem without success, trying in vain to establish a brotherhood of mankind. The Chinese thinkers Lao-tzee, Kung-tze, Tschouang-tzse, Manu, the Hindu Law-giver with his class-ridden caste system, Lord Buddha with his Agnostic philosophy and the Persian Philosopher Zarathustra, the founder of Zoroastrianism with his dualistic outlook, had all indulged in philosophical discussions and metaphysical speculations on the desirability of such a social and religious system—and all had failed miserably to equate man with man. Even the classic Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle could not free themselves of the idea of slaves, defining Greek citizens as those men belonging to an upper stratum of society, free born men of superior rank. Not until 180 B.C. Panaetius, the great pioneer of Humanism, affected by the teaching of stoicism and Epicureanism advocated the idea of human equality. His theory, and that of other Greek philosophers who followed suit, was, however merely pedagogical and academic discussion and none of his followers practised

what they preached. Ali however, affirmed with vehemence that every human being had a claim on the interest of every other human being.

### **Negative Attitudes**

The problem of sympathy has been viewed in many different ways by many different philosophers, some of whom have insisted that men must participate in the affairs of the world, while others with an escapist mentality have adopted a negative attitude by advocating a philosophy of indifference towards all things concerned with the world. This negative attitude towards life, mostly advocated by the Indian thinkers but also upheld by the ancient Chinese and by some mediaeval Christian writers defined the world as a deceptive vision and maintained that all true existence is non-material. This unreal and imaginary existence marred the realisation of reality. Hence the need, they argued, to adopt an attitude of inactivity. The safest refuge, according to these philosophers, lay in discarding worldly affairs, and man thus by detaching himself from the egotism of material interests can find bliss. The shortcoming of all these theories is that they fail utterly to inspire men to do good merely urging them to a non-committal attitude of abstaining from evil. Negative attitudes lead to indolence and to agnosticism, and are thoroughly selfish in their results.

Only a positive attitude can conform with our natural human and gregarious sentiments, inviting us, as it does, to live fully in this world but that life must be lived according to certain fundamental laws and in an orderly fashion and it must be dedicated to the uplift and well-being of humanity as a whole.

### **Positive Attitude, the Kernel of all productive Ethical Systems**

The positive philosophy of life is the kernel of all

ethical system which lead men to work for the realisation of ultimate good. Ali emphasised this positive attitude of activity in his sermons, reviving the idea of the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth. This he saw as an imminent and inevitable event. Time and time again he urged men to achieve perfection by doing good deeds, emphasising that they were essential heralds of that longed-for event and exhorted men not to forget their responsibilities towards their Creator and fellow-men. In all Ali's ethical teachings the active virtues play a most important part, especially the virtues of compassion, forgiveness, and love. Fraternity was next in importance and ought, he believed, to be inculcated in every man's life. Convinced that many of the tribal laws, belonging to the pagan days of superstition and feudalism could only hinder the progress of the society of his day, Ali advocated adherence only to the ethical laws of Islam which were of divine origin and corresponded to reason. His enthusiasm for the moral laws of Islam was boundless and he lost no opportunity to stress the need for a positive, spiritual attitude to life. In the most vehement terms he condemned the multitudinous wrongs with which he felt Arab society to have been riddled. Its superstitions were particularly repugnant to him as was the abominable practice of witchcraft. Nothing evil escaped the lash of his tongue, whether it was the mutilation of the corpses of the enemy on the battlefield, or the giving of short measure in the market-place; whether it was the maltreatment of the aged and the weaker sex or some flagrant miscarriage of justice. In short he replaced inhuman customary laws prevalent amongst the Arabs by ethical laws of Islam. An unprecedented work of reform, unique in the history of sociology was thus actuated by the discovery that the principle of sympathy was identical with the law of reason. Ali's system of law was essentially philanthropic.

**Ali's Enforcement of Moral Laws**

Once having come to the conclusions that moral laws would reform society, Ali made an intelligent and courageous effort to grapple with the problems of the time. Ali had become convinced that ethical laws must be accepted for their own sakes and that good actions should be performed for the triumph of good only and that no consideration should be paid to any practical or material assets which might incidentally accrue. Further, having been drawn from the revelations of God, these laws had the force of an absolute commandment. Only the Qur'anic commandments could be regarded as the touchstone of what was good and what was bad. The only possible course of action was to place implicit faith in these laws and then obey them. Having thus provided the people with definite and positive laws Ali expected them to obey them without thought of self; any infringement made the defaulter liable to deterrent punishment. The greatness and dignity of Ali's personal example, for he practised these laws in his own daily life made it hard for him to realise, perhaps, the difficulties that beset lesser men than himself. For him the laws were the keystone of his whole being, upholding him firm through every stress and strain.

**Systematisation**

The credit of systematising and organising the Islamic precepts, dogmas and doctrines into a compact body of Islamo-religious structure goes to Ali. Many isolated problems were united into a system of philosophy and Ali's explanations and commentaries illuminated many a thorny and dubious question. It was through Ali's commentaries that the people began to understand the truths which lay behind his interpretations and to adopt Islam as a philosophy of life. In short Islamic civilization and culture evolved from Ali's spiritual interpretations of life.

**A New Orientation**

The epitome of Ali's sermons was that man's destiny lay in the world of natural instincts and appetites, but far from encouraging men to enjoy an indolent and hedonistic life of sensuous ease, Ali put great emphasis on duty and responsibility. Ali's genius, which displayed so much of both the love of labour and the labour of love, opened up realms of human progress that had been hitherto undreamt of. He threw open the gates of knowledge and extended the frontiers of civilisation. Even after a lapse of 1350 years the Muslim world still recognises the enormous impetus which he gave to those metaphysical explanations that still form the basis of the dogmas and doctrines of Islam. Ali, in fact, had opened up a new path and his pioneer approach to and solution of the theological problems which confronted him has never been bettered by those who were thus enabled to follow in his footsteps. He remains pre-eminent among all Muslim theologians.

**Ali's Life as Caliph**

Ali, as Caliph, reigning and living in this world was still not of it, his spiritual duties always taking precedence over the sovereign duties that devolved upon him. In later life he became more and more of a recluse, absorbed almost totally in the life of spirit—somewhat retiring in solitude. In his early days as Caliph we see him, however, practising to the full the active precepts that he advocated to others. In the humility and lack of ostentation of his life, he was conforming to the code of patriarchal era. Unlike his rival Mu'awiya, who lived in a splendid palace, Ali chose to live in a simple cottage of sun-dried bricks, there leading the humble life of an ordinary soldier of God. He mended his own shoes, milked his goats and helped his household in the performance of their daily domestic duties. Although great riches passed through his hands into the State

treasury, avarice played no part in his life and he kept nothing for himself above what was needed to satisfy his most simple wants. Towards others, however, his liberality was unbounded. Constant in friendship, he retained the attachment of those who became intimately associated with him. Often he would carry the coffins of dead men on his shoulders, mourning with the other mourners for he felt that the observance of such social customs helped to regulate the civic sense of his people. On the other hand, although he advocated the utmost piety on all occasions, he was quick to deprecate any display of pious affectation. If Ali propagated the crowning merit of Good Works, he also stressed the need for their concealment. A man of quick and mighty passions, such was his control of them that, in later life, he was never known to lose his temper, save on the battlefield when fighting in the cause of God.

Nowhere was his humane attitude more apparent than when he was dispensing justice. He had the strictest ideas of duty and responsibility and even the poorest and most insignificant of suitors always found him ready to give their case a fair and prompt hearing. He was as quick to pardon an offender as he was slow to resent an injury, a humane attitude all too many of his contemporaries were prone, wrongly, to interpret as a weakness. It was this humane attitude which, above all, stamped Ali as the ideal man.

In order to keep his finger on the pulse of the people Ali often disguised himself as a traveller, perambulating the lanes of the city at night and there helping the poor and needy while bringing the delinquents to book. His tremendous physical energy thus found outlet in the performance of many a philanthropic deed, but even so, his sense of responsibility to his people was so great that he was frequently struck with remorse for all that he had left undone. Hence the bitter tears of self-deprecation which he so often shed at his prayers. Nevertheless he did a great deal of practical good. No Caliph ever rendered more active service or offered more

material, as well as spiritual help to his subjects.

In short, Ali stood for common justice and common sense: yet, for him, the loveliness of the soul remained paramount. In his sermons he preached consistently of the need to shun the temptations of this world and though, as Caliph, he was obliged to dispense justice in the world, yet he was not quite of it.

### **Liberty and Tolerance his Greatest Contributions**

As Caliph, Ali possessed two sublime qualities—tolerance and liberty. Perhaps his greatest contribution to Islam was that he considered tolerance and liberty the birth right of all and he granted unqualified liberty of speech and action to his subjects, even when by so doing he risked the gravest setbacks to his hopes. He regarded it as his responsibility to impart equitable justice to all, irrespective to whether or not the recipients were capable of good use of the freedom which he bestowed upon them or worthy of the trust that he might place in them. Even his worst enemies admitted that he never interfered with the private liberty of any of his subjects and it would be hard to find a single instance in which Ali's government ever meddled with the opinions of individuals.

That entire liberty of speech was granted to his subjects can be gleaned from the fact that men openly criticised their Caliph and his actions while religious freedom was also given to all and sundry, his officials being expressly enjoined to safeguard the interests of the "Dhimmis" or Non-Muslim subjects.

### **Ali the First in Many Fields**

Ali, the ideal man, was endowed with many unique virtues that led him, according to the Shi'ite traditions to be the first person to be or perform a number of things. According to the Shias he was "Number One" in t

following:—

- (1) He was of noblest birth for both his father and mother were Hashimites.
- (2) He was the only man to be born in the Kab'ah (the house of God).
- (3) He was the first to offer homage to the Holy Prophet.
- (4) He was the first to offer prayers after the Holy Prophet.
- (5) He was the first to offer his services for "Jihad" (crusades).
- (6) He was the first to receive religious instructions from the Holy Prophet.
- (7) He was the first to compile and codify the Qur'an.
- (8) He was the first to be styled as "brother" by the Prophet and on every occasion.
- (9) He was pre-eminently loyal, standing firm by the Prophet until his last breath.
- (10) He was the first to give burial to the Prophet, after his death.
- (11) He was the only warrior to stick to his post on the battlefield in all battles and never once turned his back.
- (12) He was the first to offer to sleep in the Prophet's bed on the night of his emigration to Medina.
- (13) He was the first to be appointed commander in all those battles in which the Holy Prophet did not participate personally.
- (14) He was pre-eminent in killing all his adversaries in all his duels.
- (15) The honour of the propagation of the Qur'anic Sura "Al-Bara'at" (the Immunity) fell to Ali's lot, thereby raising him supreme above all others.
- (16) He was the only man on whom the Holy Prophet bestowed the title "a Second Aaron".
- (17) The privilege of breaking idols in the Kab'ah, (after the conquest of Mecca) also fell to Ali's good fortune.
- (18) The honour of owning a house which opened into

the courtyard of the Prophet's mosque was reserved for Ali alone

- (19) Ali was the first to have such a unique wife as Fatima, and a unique father-in-law like the Prophet and sons like Hasan and Hussain.
- (20) Ali was the first to have the honour of being nominated by the Holy Prophet as his successor, testator and vice-regent.
- (21) Ali was also honoured by being styled "Moula" (master) of the "Ummah" (nation) by the Holy Prophet.

### **Ali's Superiority over Ancient Prophets**

The Shia writers allege that Ali was head and shoulders above the prophets of yore, and that, by wearing the royal robes of a Caliph, he rather exalted the dignity of the office of Caliphate than enhancing his dignity by it. The Believers depended on Ali in all matters whether secular or spiritual and Ali in no way depended on them. Ali excelled in virtue over the ancient prophets on the following counts:—

- (1) God gave Adam the knowledge of His Names, while Ali held the entire knowledge of the Book of Allah (the Qur'an).
- (2) Adam was married with Eve in the garden of Paradise, while God married Ali with Fatima in Heaven.
- (3) Adam was guilty of insubordination to God by eating the forbidden fruit, while all actions of Ali were in conformity with the will of God.
- (4) Adam was turned out of the Paradise, while Ali showed the way to it to the Believers.
- (5) God styled Noah as a "Grateful Creature" and was called the Second Adam, while Ali was style as "Abu'l Ummah" (the father of the Believers) Ali's epistles served as a Second Ark of Light redeem mankind.
- (6) God made Abraham the "Imam" or the 'Lead

of men' while Ali was the Imam of all creation, men and Jinnis.

- (7) The faith of Abrham chilled the fire into which he was thrown while the light of Ali's faith could freeze the fire of Hell.
- (8) Abraham was afraid of the angels, while they were the household pages of Ali.
- (9) Abraham broke the smaller idols of the temple, while Ali broke both the big and small idols of the Kab'ah.
- (10) Moses was brought up in the house of Pharaoh, but Ali was brought up in the house of the Holy Prophet.
- (11) The waves of the river carried the cradle of Moses to the palace of Pharaoh, whereas Ali was carried to Muhammad's house by the pious Fatima (the mother of Ali).
- (12) Moses after his birth saw the light of day in Pharaoh's house, whereas Ali saw the light of day in Kab'ah and was brought up by Muhammad.
- (13) Moses was fed by the milk of his mother and Ali while a babe sucked the tongue of Muhammad.
- (14) Moses's name has been mentioned in 230 places in the Qur'an, while Ali has been referred to in 300 places in the Qur'an.
- (15) Moses threw his rod which became a serpent, whereas Ali, while still in the cradle, cleaved the snake into two.
- (16) God created Jesus from His Spirit whereas He created Ali from His Light.
- (17) After delivery, Jesus's mother was turned out of Jerusalem whereas Ali's mother at the time of his delivery was in the sanctuary of the Kab'ah.
- (18) Jesus, after his birth recited a few verses from the Scriptures, whereas Ali repeated all the revealed Books after his birth.

### **Ali's Superiority Recognised by the Holy Prophet**

The Holy Prophet recognised the superiority of Ali

in many of his sayings. The most important of them are:—

- (1) People are from different trees but I and Ali are from a common branch of a single tree.  
(Sawai'q Muhairqa)
- (2) To look at Ali's face is tantamount to the observance of prayers  
(Musnad Hakam)
- (3) Whosoever loves Ali, loves me, and the one who loves me loves God and whosoever became hostile towards Ali became hostile to me and whosoever shows hostility towards me shows hostility towards God.  
(Sawai'q Muhari'qa)
- (4) Ali is the "Imam" (leader) of the pious, the Scourge of the wicked and happy will be he who will follow Ali and debased that one who gives up Ali.  
(Musnid Hakam)
- (5) Ali would appear to the indwellers of paradise as a morning star.  
(Sawai'q Muhari'qa)
- (6) Paradise anxiously awaits three persons, Ali, Umar and Salman.  
(Tirmidhi)
- (7) If (the branches) of all the trees be converted into pens and the water of the Seas made into ink and the Jinnis be deputed for reckoning and the men should become the writers, even then no one can finish the excellences of Ali.  
(Munaqib Khawar zumi)
- (8) Addressing his daughter, Fatima, the holy Prophet said, "O thou daughter of mine ! Of all the creatures in this world, God has selected two persons, one of them is your father and the other is your husband."  
(Izalatu'l Khufa)
- (9) Whosoever wants to make his life and death like that of mine and is desirous of entering heaven, i behoves him to befriend Ali because he would neither let his friends be ejected from paradise nor allow them to enter there in ignorance.  
(Tarikhu'l Khulfa)
- (10) Addressing his companion Umar, the Holy Prophet said, "O thou Umar! Should you behol

that Ali is on one side and the rest of the world on the other, surely it will be incumbent on you that you should follow Ali because he would never lead any one to the path of destruction and will never relinquish the path of right."

(Jamia-ul-Saghir Sayuti)

- (11) The palace of Ali, in Paradise, will be in the middle, or one side of which will be situated my residential quarters, while on the other will be the quarter of Abraham. How pleasant it will be when one companion will be living amidst two friends.

(Kunzu'l Umma'l)

- (12) Ali is my brother, my vizier, and the best of mankind after me.

(Munaqib Khawarizumi)

- (13) One day while conversing with Ayesha, the Holy Prophet said, "Ali is 'Sayyid-ul-Arab' (the chief of the Arabs)" on which she said, "Are not you the chief of the Arabs yourself?". "Nay" replied the Prophet, "I am Sayyid-ul-Alameen" (the chief of the worlds).

(Sawa'iq Muhariqa)

- (14) Whosoever spoke ill of Ali, spoke ill of me.

(Musnad Hakam)

- (15) O Ali! Both groups of men will perish, that of your enemies who have impaired your excellence and the other which extolled your position and rank.

(Sawai'q Muhari'qa)

- (16) The Holy Prophet in one of his Khutbas said, "God has so much exalted my brother Ali that his numerous virtues could not be counted easily: whosoever from amongst you narrated one of his excellences, God will forgive his past and future sins; and whosoever will record one of his excellences, the angels will bless him as long as his writing remains, whosoever will hear about him affectionately with his ears, the sins of the ear will be forgiven and whosoever will read about his virtues with eyes, the sins of the eye will be forgiven to him. Beware! That man is not steadfast in faith, who does not love Ali and shun his enemies."

### **The Superiority of Ali Recognised by his Contemporaries**

Abu Bakr, the first Caliph of Islam, at one time said, "It would be difficult indeed for any one to pass through the bridge of "Sirat", on the Day of Judgment without getting a permit from Ali, because this is what I have heard from the Holy Prophet."

(Sawai'q Muhair'qa)

Umar the Great, the second Caliph of Islam, related that once the Holy Prophet said, "If the faith of the inhabitants of the seven Earths be put on one side of the scale, and that of Ali alone on the other side, verily Ali's side will weigh heavier than the other."

According to Imam Shafi, Ali will judge mankind and allot them paradise and hell. He was the leader of men and Jinnis, a true testator of the Holy Prophet. If the followers of Ali are "Raffidhes" (the heterogeneous sect of Shias) verily I am one of that sect. Ali at the time of the breaking of idols in the Kab'ah put his feet on that shoulder where God had put His hand on the 'Night of Miraj' and verily Ali was that man into whose eyes was shone the light of God."

Once, Imam Ahmad asked his father, Imam Hanbul, as to who was superior, Mu'awiya or Ali, to which query Imam Hanbul replied, "Ali had numerous enemies and all of them tried to find fault with him but they searched in vain and could not find any flaw in him. At long last they joined hands with Mu'awiya and declared war on Ali. When they failed to defeat him by fair means they took to treacherous and deceitful courses to harm him."

Ibn Athir says, "Ali was the first Caliph both of whose parents were pure Hashmites and who was so judicial minded that he could not put up with the dishonesty of his relations or friends and was so much engrossed in piety that at the time of his marriage with Fatima, he did not possess anything save a camel skin, on which he fed his camels in the day and which he converted into a

bed sheet at night. The Prophet in his table talk has not extolled any of his companions as much as he has Ali. Surely Ali never spoke a lie in his life-time."

Some one asked the Ummayyad Caliph, Umar bin Abdul Aziz (717-20 A.D.) as to whom he considered the most pious man in the world, to which query he replied, "Ali excelled mankind in piety. Not only did he practise its virtues but he tried zealously to reform his friends, associates, acquaintances and all those who came in contact with him."

Ibn Masud used to say that throughout Arabia there was no more impartial judge than Ali. Abu Saeed Khudiri held that he could easily detect a hypocrite by his enmity towards Ali.

Abdullah ibn Abbas used to say that should schism seep into Islam, it would be bounden duty of the Believers to take firm hold of Ali (i.e. his teachings) and the Qur'an for I have heard the Prophet say, "Ali was the first to believe in me, he will be the first to meet me in Paradise and will be the greatest discriminator of truth from falsehood, he is the leader of all the Believers, he is the 'Sadiq-i-Akbar' (The great truthful one) and is that door (of faith) the entry into which will lead to Paradise." (Munaqib ibn Murwaiya)

### **The Superiority of Ali as Revealed in the Qur'an**

Since Ali was an ideal man, the one chosen by God to serve as a model to mankind, the Shi'ite traditions hold that some 300 verses of the Qur'an in which God has recognised his virtues, were revealed in Ali's favour. Some of the most important verses are:—

"59. O ye who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those above you who are in authority; and if ye have a dispute concerning any matter, refer it to Allah and the Messenger if ye are (in truth) believers in Allah and the Last Day. That is better and more seemly in the end." (4:59)

The Shia commentators, while discussing the identity of those persons, who in this verse are described as 'Those in authority above you', maintain that they could not be any other save Ali and his descendants, the sinless Imams. The Sunnite traditions interpret them as the rulers of that time—a version which is rejected by the Shias on the ground that obedience to these secular rulers, who were fallible and whose decisions could be faulty, could not be enforced on believers, and subservience to them in wrongful acts being tantamount to the abetment of their impious actions. Hence, argue the Shias, the Sinless Imams, inspired by divine knowledge are the only persons who could enforce Allah's will and none save these can be the persons in authority.

"33. Allah's wish is but to remove uncleanness far from you, O Folk of the (Prophet's) household, and cleanse you with a thorough cleansing." (33:33)

The Shia commentators, on the authority of Ayesha, say that this verse was revealed to the Prophet early one morning when the Apostle of God was wrapped in a blanket in which he subsequently wrapped Fatima, Hasan, Hussain and Ali, the Prophet's household as referred to in the above verse.

"61. And whoso disputeth with thee concerning him, after the knowledge which hath come unto thee, say (unto him): Come! We will summon our sons and your sons, and our women and your women and ourselves and yourselves. Then we will pray humbly (to our Lord) and (solemnly) invoke the curse of Allah upon those who lie." (3:361)

This verse alludes to the deputation of the Christians of Najran who went to Medina to hold discussions with

the Holy Prophet on the truth of Islam. The Holy Prophet argued the case with them but, when all arguments were exhausted and they were still not convinced, he asked them to pray earnestly to invoke the curse of God on whichever side was lying. This verse refers to the fact that the Holy Prophet was accompanied by Ali, Fatima, Hassan and Hussain (people forming "the Prophet's household") and says that these came out as a party to conduct the "Mubalah" or religious discussion with the Christians. The Shias argue that this establishes the sanctity of Ali's life otherwise the Prophet would not have called upon his daughter and sons to be witnesses

- "3. And a proclamation from God and His Apostle to the people on the day of greater pilgrimage that Allah is free from obligation to the idolaters and (so is) His Messenger. So, if ye repent, it will be better for you: but if you are averse, then know ye that ye cannot escape Allah. Give tidings (O Muhammad) of a painful doom to those who disbelieve. (9:3)

This refers to an incident about the end of 631 A.D. when, during the absence of the Holy Prophet on an expedition to Tabuk, the idolatrous tribes, taking advantage of the Prophet's absence, violated their treaties. The Holy Prophet ordered Ali to go on the "Greater pilgrimage" to Mecca and there announce publicly the verses of the Sura of "Immunity" in which God absolved the Muslims from all obligations under the treaties previously entered upon with the idolaters...

- "23. Say (O Muhammad unto mankind). I do not ask of you any reward for it but love for relatives and whoever earns good." (42:23)

The Shia traditions say that on the authority of Abdullah Ibn Abbas, at the time of the revelation of this

verse, when people asked the Holy Prophet as to who were the relatives alluded to in this verse, the Apostle of God said, "Verily they allude to Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Hussain."

"7. Thou art only a warner and a guide for every people." (13:7)

On the authority of Abdullah Ibn Abbas, when someone, at the revelation of this verse asked the Holy Prophet as to what was the connotation of 'Guide' in this verse, he said, "Verily I am the warner and Ali is the guide."

On another occasion, says a Shi'ite tradition, the Holy Prophet asked for some water to perform his ablutions. He then took Ali's hand and having placed it on his chest said, I am the warner and then placing his own hand on Ali's chest said, "Verily thou art the guide for all peoples. Thou art the inviter of the nations to truth and a commander of the believers in faith." The Shi'ite traditions further argue that what can be said of Ali could be applied with greater emphasis to Ali's descendants, the Imams, who were specifically initiated in the role of guide and accordingly vested with special authority.

"21. Nay! Do those who commit evil deeds suppose that we shall treat them like those who believe and do good—that their life and their death shall be equal? Bad is their judgment." (45: 21)

Ibn Abbas says that the doers of good referred to in this verse are Ali, Humza and Ubaydah bin Harrith.

"17. Is he (to be counted equal with them) who relieth on a clear proof from his Lord and a witness from Him reciteth it, and before it was the Book of Moses, an example and a

mercy? Such believe therein, and whoso disbelieveth therein of the clans, the Fire is his appointed place. So be not thou in doubt concerning it. Lo! it is the truth from thy Lord; but most of mankind believe not."

(11: 17)

A'd Ibn Abdullah relates how, one day he witnessed Ali ascending the pulpit from where he delivered a sermon in which he said, "hardly is there a man from amongst the Quriash who has not been referred to in the Quran." At this some one rose up and asked Ali as to which was the verse of the Qur'an which alluded specifically to him. Then Ali recited the above verse and said it bore him reference.

- "4. Now if both of you turn upto Allah repentant, it will be better for you, and your hearts are already so inclined. But if you back up each other against him, surely Allah is his Helper and Gabriel and the righteous among the believers; and furthermore, all other angels too are his helpers." (66: 4)

Ibn Abbas states that the Holy Prophet had also said that the righteous men alluded to as Helper in this verse referred to Ali.

- "18. Is he who is a believer like unto him who is an evil-doer? Verily they are not equal." (32:18)

Ibn Abbas states that this verse contains an allusion to Ali and Walid bin Utba, where the former is mentioned as a believer and the later referred to as a disbeliever.

- "19. Do you hold the giving of drink to the pilgrims, and the maintenance of the Sacred Mosque as equal to the works of him who believes in

Allah and the Last Day and striveth in the path of Allah? They are not at all equal in the sight of Allah. And Allah guides not the unjust people.” (9: 19)

According to the Shi'ite tradition, the person referred to as “one who believes in God, and the Last Day and the one who fights in the way of God” is Ali.

“67. O Messenger (of God)! Convey to the people what has been revealed to thee from thy Lord; and if thou do it not thou hast not conveyed His Message at all. And Allah will protect thee from men. Surely, Allah guides not the disbelieving people.” (5: 67)

According to the Shi'ite commentators, this verse alludes to the proclamation of the Holy Prophet at Ghaidar Khum where, according to their interpretation, Ali was declared the successor of God's Apostle. Here the Holy Prophet is enjoined to give wide publicity to this divine injunction.

Other verses alluding to Ali's superiority are:—

“7. Verily those who believe and do good works—they are the best of creatures.” (98: 7)

“207. And of men there is he who would sell himself to seek the pleasure of Allah and Allah is compassionate to His servants.” (2:207)

“16. Which is it, of the favours of your Lord, that ye deny? 17. The Lord of the two Easts and the Lord of two Wests! 18. Which is it, of the favours of your Lord that ye deny? 19. He has made the two bodies of water flow. They will one day meet. 20. There is now a barrier between them; they encroach

not one upon the other. 21. Which, is it, of the favours of your Lord that ye deny? 22. There come out from them pearls and coral.” (55 : 16—22)

Uns bin Malik in his commentary on these verses says that the “two seas” here referred to allegorically, represent Ali and Fatima and their pearls and corals are Hasan and Hussain.

“83. My Lord! Bestow wisdom on me and join me with the righteous.” (26:83)

The “righteous” person here is Ali, in contradistinction to the arch-enemy of the Prophet, Abu Jahl, referred to in the next verse quoted below:—

“1. In the name of Allah, the Gracious, and the Merciful. 2. By the fleeting time. 3. Surely man is in a state of loss. 4. Except those who believe and do good works, and exhort one another to accept truth, and enjoin on each other to be steadfast and patient.” (103:1—4)

“1. By the star when it setteth. 2. Your comrade erreth not, nor is deceived. 3. Nor does he speak of his own desire.” (53:1—3)

The Shia commentators allege that one day, the Holy Prophet was sitting amidst a circle of several Quraish when all of a sudden a star broke from the sky. At this, the Prophet said that the person in whose house it would fall, would be my “Wassi” (testator). It fell in Ali’s house and thus according to their interpretation he became the Holy Prophet’s testator.

“54. And He it is who created man from water, and hath appointed for him kindred by blood and kindred by marriage; and thy Lord is All-Powerful.” (25:54)

The relationship in blood and marriage, say the Shi'ite traditions can only refer to Ali, who was the first cousin and son-in-law of the Holy Prophet.

- "47. And We shall remove whatever rancour may be in their breasts, so that they will become like brothers, seated on thrones, facing one another." (15:47)

The Shi'ite traditions say that the Holy Prophet one day told Ali that he with his wife Fatima will rest with him in paradise on the Day of judgment.

- "43. Establish worship, pay the poor rate and bow down your heads with those who bow (in worship)." (2:43)

The Shi'ite traditions claim that this verse was revealed to exalt the glory of the Holy Prophet and Ali, who were the first to bow down in prayers.

- "41. And if We take thee away. We shall surely exact retribution from them." (43: 41)

On the authority of Jabir ibn Abdullah it is stated that the Holy Prophet said that this revelation referred to Ali who would subsequently prove to be the avenger of wrong-doers after the Prophet's death.

- "36. (This lamp of light) is lit in houses which Allah hath allowed to be exalted and that his name be remembered in them. There in is He glorified in the mornings and evenings." (24:36)

On the authority of Uns ibn Malik the Holy Prophet is stated to have said that the "houses" referred to in this verse included the house of Ali and Fatima.

"61. Is he, then, to whom We have promised a goodly promise the fulfilment of which he will meet, like the one whom We have provided with the good things of this life and then on the Day of Resurrection he will be of those who will be brought arraigned before God?" (28:61)

The Shia commentators hold that this verse was revealed in favour of Ali and Fatima.

"55. Your friend is only Allah and His Messenger and the believers who observe prayer and pay the poor rate and bow down in prayers." (5:55)

The Shi'ite traditions maintain that at one time, while Ali and the Holy Prophet were offering prayers in a Mosque, a supplicant came and said, "O God, bear witness that I have asked every one of the congregation to give me something in alms but none has offered anything." Ali who prostrated on his prayer mat at that time held out his finger, which bore a ring and pointed out towards the beggar, who took it off. It was at this juncture that this verse was revealed. The Prophet is also said to have predicted that, like Moses's brother Aaron, his cousin Ali would find support in his descendants.

"12. O ye Who believe! When you consult the Messenger in private, give alms before your consultation. That is better and purer for you. But if you do not find (the wherewithal) then lo! Allah is forgiving and Merciful." (58:12)

At the revelation of this verse, the Holy Prophet asked Ali to tell the people to give charity before seeking audience with him. Ali told the Prophet, that the people, being poor, could not give alms. Then the Prophet told Ali to persuade people to give just one

"Dinar" (the coin then prevalent in Arabia) in alms. When Ali said that they were unable to give even that much, the Prophet reduced the amount to half a dinar and when this was also objected to, the Prophet reduced the alms still further. It was thus in answer to the pleadings of Ali that the amount of charity was so fixed as to come within the reach of all and sundry.

- "8. And you shall be divided into three groups; 9. First, those on the right hand—how lucky are those on the right hand; 10. Second, those on the left hand—how unlucky are those on the left hand—11. Third, the foremost; they are the foremost; 12. Those are they who will have achieved nearness to God." (56:8—12)

The Shi'ite traditions allege that when Ibn Abbas asked the Holy Prophet the explanation of these verses, he replied that they alluded to Ali when on the Day of Resurrection the doom of men would be pronounced.

- "58. Verily, those who malign Allah and His Messenger—Allah has cursed them in this world and in the Hereafter, and has prepared for them an abasing punishment." (33: 58)

According to Ibn Salman this verse was revealed when the hypocrites of Medina were harrasing Ali.

- "181. And of those We have created there are people that guide men with truth and do justice therewith." (7:181)

The Shi'ite traditions allege that Ali used to say that the Muslims would be divided into 73 sects, of which 72 sects would be doomed to hell and the right ones (i.e. the followers of Ali alone) would enter the Paradise.

"29. Those who believe and do right: Joy is for them and bliss their journey's end." (13:29)

This verse, according to the Shia commentators, also alludes to Ali and his followers.

"6. The Prophet is nearer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are as mothers to them. And blood relations are nearer to one another, according to the Book of Allah, than the rest of the believers from among the Helpers as well as the Emigrants except that you show kindness to your friends. That also is written down in the Book (of nature)."

On the authority of Ibn Abbas it is related that this verse also, as does the one quoted next, relate to Ali.

"89. Whoso does a good deed shall have a better reward than its worth; and such are safe from terror that day. 90. And those who bring an ill deed shall be thrown down on their faces into the fire: Are you rewarded aught save what ye did?" (27:89-90)

"57. And when the son of Mary (Jesus Christ) is cited as an example, lo! the people jeer thereat." (43:57)

The Prophet is said to have told Ali one day that the later's example would be like that of Jesus Christ. A section of people would love him so much that it would willingly perish in hell-fire for him, while the other section who would show hatred to him would be doomed similarly.

"101. Lo! As for those for whom the promise of a good reward has already gone forth from us, these will be removed far from it". (21:101)

- "19. Then, as for him who is given his record in his right hand he will say, "come read my record."  
(69:19)

According to the Shia commentators the one who will handle the record will be Ali.

- "43. And We sent not as Messengers before thee but men to whom We sent revelation, so ask those who possess the Reminder, if ye know not."  
(16:43)

Shia commentators add that the mention of "Zikar" or "Reminder" in this verse applies to learned men, especially to Ali.

- "32. Those who disbelieve and hinder men from the way of Allah and oppose the Messenger after guidance has become manifest to them, shall not harm Allah in the least; and He will make their work fruitless."  
(47:32)

According to Imam Abu Jafar, this verse refers to those people who disputed with the Holy Prophet about Ali and his title to piety and succession.

- "29. Muhammad is the Apostle of God. And those with him are firm against the disbelievers and merciful amongst themselves. Thou (O Muhammad) seest them bowing down and prostrating themselves in prayer, seeking grace from Allah and His pleasure. Their mark is upon their faces, being the traces of prostrations. Such is their description in the Torah. And their description in the Gospel is like unto a seed-produce that sends forth its sprout, then makes it strong; it then becomes thick, and stands on its stem, delighting the sowers—that He

may cause the disbelievers to burn with rage at the sight of them. Allah has promised, unto those of them who believe and do good works, forgiveness and a great reward." (48:29)

According to the commentary of Imam Abu Musa, this verse was revealed in Ali's favour.

"43. And those who disbelieve say, "Thou are not a Messenger" say "Sufficient is Allah as a witness between me and you, and so is he who possesses knowledge of the Book." (13:43)

According to the interpretation of Muhammad bin Hanfia the phrase 'Whosoever has the knowledge of the Book' alludes to Ali.

"2. Those who disbelieve from among the people of the Book and the idolaters would not desist from disbelieving until there came to them clear evidence. 3. A Messenger from Allah, reciting unto them the pure scriptures. 4. There in are lasting commandments. 5. And those to whom the Book was given did not become divided until after clear evidence had come to them. (98:2—5)

The Shia commentators assert that by the phrase "clear-proof" in these verses is meant the Holy Prophet and the phrase "clear evidence" designates Ali and his descendants.

"64. O prophet! Allah is sufficient for thee and (for) such of the believers as follow thee." (8:64)

According to Imam Muhammad Baqir, this verse was also revealed in Ali's favour.

"3. (I swear) By the Even and the Odd." (89:3)

According to the Shia commentators, "Even" in this verse stands For Hasan and Hussain (sons of Ali) and "Odd" stands for Ali.

"33. But Allah would not chastise them while thou wert among them, and Allah would not punish them while they sought forgiveness." (8:33)

The Shia commentators interpret "thou wert among them" as the descendants of Ali, who are the mainstay and the prop of God's message on this earth.

### **Ali's Ineffaceable Marks on Islamic theology**

We have seen that Ali was a great philosopher, thinker, theologian and intrepid warrior of God. He was a born general who took up his sword against the evil forces of the godless rebels who intended to introduce innovations into Islam. Ali's dominant personality has left permanent marks on Islamic theology, indeed all the sects of Islam accept, in entirety, all Ali's interpretations of the laws, dogmas and doctrines. The expositions of Ali have passed into classical traditions and they have become so mixed with Islamic theology as to be inseparable. These versions have become a part and parcel of Islamic theology and no one can deny the decisive impression that they have left on Islam. Ali, the incarnation of the spirit of piety, extracts homage not only from the Shias but also from the Sunnis and all the non-sectarian creeds of Islam.

## CHAPTER XXII

## ALI THE MAN

**A Paragon of Virtue**

Ali, as a man was a paragon of virtue. The fame of his piety had spread far and wide, in particular of his attitude to prayers, when his fear in the presence of God and the sense that he had so many responsibilities towards his fellow-men still unfulfilled caused him to fall into a deep trance.

**Ali at his Prayers**

Abu Durda, who had hitherto been accounted the most perfect saint of that time used to say, "None in this world has excelled Ali in prayer and meditation". Often Ali would weep and, shedding tears of remorse while he bowed humbly before the Majesty of God, would say thus:—

"O thou Lord, Who art the refuge and shelter of all. Often hast thou saved me from many a pitfall and showered thy blessing on me. Having hid my sins under the cover of thy benevolence, thou hast saved me from many a temptation. O Almighty Lord! Although my sins have exceeded (all bounds) and my evil deeds have multiplied enormously, yet there is none else save thy Mercy which can save me."

"O Lord! When I look upon thy clemency (and compare it with my sins) I find that my faults are minor. When I think of your punishments (that await the sinner in hell) I think that the multiplication of my sins has

passed all limits. Alas! What will become of me, when I will be informed of those sins which I have forgotten but of which you are well aware. Neither my tribesmen, nor the members of my family will save me at that juncture. O the fire of hell which will roast me alive! O the flaring up of that fire which burns everything!"

So saying, Ali would fall into a swoon. Abu Durda recalls how, on one such occasions, he found Ali lying rigid on his prayer-mat and, touching his cold body, decided that he must have breathed his last. On breaking to Fatima the sad news, he was told by her, "My husband (Ali) frequently becomes unconscious when praying, from fear of God. He must have fallen into a usual swoon." Abu Durda goes on to relate how, himself weeping profusely, he then took some water which he sprinkled over Ali's face, whereupon Ali regained consciousness.

Seeing the tears in Abu Durda's eyes, Ali said to him, "Why are you crying? You shed tears when you see me in this state, imagine then, what will happen to me when the Angels drag me into the presence of God and I am forced to render an account of my deeds. They will bind me with fetters of iron and present me before God and those of my friends who will be witnesses will be powerless to help me. They will lament my unhappy plight but none save God will be able to help me on that day."

Imam Zayn-ul-Abidin (literary "the adornment of the Pious") who was likewise renowned amongst the believers for his chastity and piety, used to say, "Is there any one, who ever prayed like Ali?"

Some traditions say that while absorbed in meditation, Ali would forget his bodily self entirely. During the battle of Uhud, Ali is said to have received an arrow in his foot, which could not be extracted without a painful operation. The Holy Prophet<sup>1</sup> is reported to have said, "Leave the arrow alone. Wait until Ali has

1. According to another account the arrow emerged out from Ali's body when offering prayers in a state of trance without any operation.

lost himself in prayer, it is then that the surgeon should draw it out." This the surgeon did, the prayer-mat becoming a pool of blood, but Ali was so absorbed in prayer that he did not notice what was happening.

Even during the thick of battle, Ali would spread his prayer-mat and offer prayers as if nothing was happening around him. The arrow of the enemies might pass close to his face but undaunted and heedless of the consequences, he would still carry on with his prayers.

### **Ali's Observance of the Fasts**

As Ali had no parallel in the performance of prayers, so too he had no equal in the observance of fasts. He would refrain from eating or drinking from sunrise to sunset suspending all bodily animation and becoming a living spirit. Because of his constant fasting he earned the epithets of "Qaimu'l Lail" (the keeper of nights) and "Saimu'l Nahar" (the observer of days). When participating in the wars of Jihad, he would fast even when fighting, putting up with the hardship of battles on an empty stomach; he used also to exhort his soldiers to observe the sanctity of the fasts, arguing that fasting was the easiest and surest means of redeeming their sins.

It often happened that at the time of sunset, when he might be expected to break his fast, he would find himself without provisions and after drinking a little water he would then observe the fast until the next day, losing himself once again in prayer.

### **The Daily Routine of Ali's Life**

Ali's daily routine consisted of getting up early in the morning, before the break of dawn, and then repairing to the mosque, where he offered his prayers. During the ministry of the Holy Prophet, after his morning prayers, Ali occupied himself in writing out the Qur'an or in delivering sermons to the people who

thronged round his door. It was in these addresses that he expounded the doctrines and dogmas of Islam. He also assisted the Holy Prophet in the disposal of Secretarial routine, working as his amanuensis until the break for the noon or "Zuhur" prayers. From the noon break until the "Usur" prayers (mid-afternoon) he remained busy with administrative work, issuing orders to the provincial governors and other officials. From mid-afternoon prayers till sunset prayers, he heard judicial cases and pronounced judgement on them. In the absence of these cases he delivered lectures and enlightened the congregation on matters of religion, discussing canons of "Sharia" (Islamic law) and the exposition of dogmas and doctrines. He remained busy up to the time of night prayers, after the performance of which he went home, there to spend the greater part of the night in prayer and meditation. After a few hours sleep on a mat, the break of dawn heralded the repeat of this routine for the next day. As Ali fasted on all days the question of breakfast and lunch did not arise.

### **Ali's Views on Annual Pilgrimage**

Along with the offering of prayers and the observance of fasts Ali attached great importance to the Annual Pilgrimage to the Kab'ah in Mecca. Ali is said to have performed ten 'Hajs' in company with the Holy Prophet, a fact which contributed to his having the epithets "Quibla t' Ullah" and "Kaba t'Ullah" added to his name.

In many of his addresses he urged the people to be zealous in paying a visit to the House of God. During his reign, caravans used to travel to Mecca from many distant parts and he issued instructions to his officials to see that the pilgrims lacked nothing for their comfort and convenience. Free food was provided at every halt, also dispensaries were established to distribute free medicines to the sick. Travellers on business other than

that of the Lord could also count on free food, water and medicine.

Ali, in another such sermon, exhorted the Believers thus:—"Whatever hardship one bears in the trials of life and endeavours to fulfil the will of God, one acquires goodness and righteousness by them. God, for the examination of his men, has built His House of stones, the pilgrimage to which is a pillar of strength for the Believers. God has built His House in a sandy and stony desert—the soil of which is the hardest, the most unproductive and barren. It is a place where you cannot find water for miles, the roads and tracks of which have been made with utmost difficulty between the impassable barren rocks. The soil of this sandy desert is further remarkable for having no verdure and vegetation. Its suburbs are nothing short of wilderness. Agriculture there is none, on which its inhabitants may live. It lacks miserably in pastures on which the quadrupeds may live. The sheep and the cows remain lean and horses and camels there are none.

It was on some such ground that God selected the site of His House and ordered men to come here to pay Him homage from the distant parts of the earth. At long last such a barren, sandy and stony place soon became the rendezvous of mankind. People from abroad and afar, after having crossed the oceans and traversing the long rocky paths on foot (dismounting from their horses and camels) came here to have a glimpse of the Lord's house. O what untold privations they bear and put up with! They busy themselves in praising their Lord and offering Him prayers. In their fervour not to lag behind the others, the people heedless of their economic conditions, hurry to present themselves before God. With dust and sand in their dishevelled hair, their torn and shabby clothes, their uncut long nails, their wounded feet, their unsewn pilgrim garments in which they clad themselves, these pilgrims display their religious zeal and fervour. Herein, is the examination of all. God has strictly ordained the followers of Islam to bear

these hardships cheerfully so that these very privations may ultimately become a source of salvation. O thou men! The pilgrimage is near at hand, let us all go and participate in it."

### **Ali's Views on Charity**

(Ali was always extremely poor yet he was as renowned for his charity as he was for his piety) Because he never owned any money or goods of his own he had to be exempted from the Zakah, the obligatory alms tax levied on every male and female Muslim of means, but whenever his share of the "Ghanima" (booty) or "Fay" came into his hands, he immediately distributed it amongst the poor and destitute, giving not a proportion of it but all till nothing remained for himself or his family. Tales of Ali's outstanding charitableness were on the lips of every one, such as the story, already related in a previous chapter, (of the beggar receiving a ring while Ali lay prostrate on his prayer-mat). Shi'ite tradition alleges that the angel Gabriel appeared to the Holy Prophet at that time and revealed the following verse of the Qur'an:—

"55. (Your friend is only Allah and His Messenger and the Believers who observe prayers and Zakah, even in prostration when worshipping God alone)" (5:55)

(Another story relates how somebody presented 300 gold coins to the Holy Prophet who made a present of them to Ali. Ali immediately decided to give them away in three instalments of 100 pieces. On his way home, after finishing his night prayers, he saw a harlot, to whom he gave the first one hundred coins.) Early next morning the whole town was gossiping about Ali's misplaced charity and how he had squandered money on a woman of ill repute. (Ali was highly offended and decided to give the next instalment of 100 pieces to a worthier soul. Returning home the next night, after

prayers he met a man, who was to all intents and purposes a thief, yet he gave him the money.) Again the gossips tattled, saying that this time Ali had given the money to a worthless and good-for-nothing fellow, a rumour which determined Ali to dispense the remaining 100 pieces more wisely and to a truly deserving person. (On the third night he met a rich man to whom he gave the remainder of the money. At this the people again murmured against Ali saying that he had wasted the money on a worthless miser.) Now no money was left and Ali repaired to the Holy Prophet, to whom he related what had transpired. The Holy Prophet told Ali that the angel Gabriel had visited him and informed him that God had accepted Ali's charity on all three occasions. The harlot after getting the money had given up prostitution and had resolved to lead a chaste life; the thief after getting the money had resolved to give up larceny and had entered into honest business and the rich man had been so shamed at receiving alms from someone as poor as Ali that he had decided to cease hoarding wealth and give all he possessed to the poor.

(That Ali's charity had proved acceptable to Almighty God was also revealed in the following Quranic Verse:—

“37. Men, whom neither merchandise nor business diverts from the remembrance of Allah and the observance of the prayers and the giving of alms. They fear a day in which hearts and eyes will be agitated.” (24:37)

(Not only did Ali practise charity himself but he preached it to others.) A great many of his sermons stress the importance of alms giving. In one of these he said, “Of the various meritorious acts of a Believer, one of the most acceptable is “Zakah”. It behoves every one to give charity because from amongst the acts of worship this is the one most pleasing to God. (In another sermon he emphasised that God had sent men in this world only to test them. When a man dies his relatives ask how much wealth he has left, while the

angels look to see how much he had given in charity, in the path of God.) O thou people! Send a part of your wealth to God so that it may stand you in good stead in the next world. Do not leave your entire wealth here so as to be a source of annoyance to you (in the world to come)."

(Whenever Ali learned that someone was hungry or thirsty, naked or in debt, he would provide food, drink, clothes and money for him.' He would go to the houses of the sick, nurse them and give them money and medicines. Although Ali's shirts, wearing apparel and shoes were full of patches, yet he felt the greatest pleasure in clothing other. Whenever Ali used to visit the bazars of Kufa, he would help the travellers, the aged and the infirm. He was particularly kind to the elderly who could not support themselves and the widows who were left destitute.)

(Once Ali saw a woman who was carrying on her shoulders a water-skin which was too heavy a load for her feeble body. Ali took the load on to his own shoulder and accompanied her to her house. She had a number of children who awaited her arrival anxiously. In the course of talk, Ali came to know that her husband was a Kharajite who had fallen in a battle fighting against him (Ali). The widow tended the destitute children and earned her living by doing odd jobs and working for others. The next day Ali again repaired to the hut of the widow, with a basketful of eatables. On his way towards her home, Ali met a number of people, who wanted to carry the basket for him but the Caliph refused to take any one's help saying, "You will share my burden today but who will be there to share it on the Day of Judgment." Thus carrying the basket on his shoulders the Caliph reached the widow's house, knocked at her door and put the provisions before her. The poor woman was overjoyed and in great excitement said, "May God bless you. Let the Almighty decide between me and Ali." At this Ali said, "Either let me bake you some bread with this flour

that I have brought you or you bake it and I will play with your children and try to cheer them up." The woman replied, "I will do the baking if you will light the oven for me." Ali, who had been distributing dates to the children immediately apologised for his discourtesy in not having offered to light the fire. When it flamed up and he felt the heat of the oven scorching his face he said, "Taste the heat of this fire: imagine what punishment awaits one who had neglected the widows and orphans." In the meantime the next door neighbour had come in and had recognised Ali as the Caliph. "Cursed be thou", she said, reprimanding the widow, "How dare you talk so insolently to the Commander of the Faithful?" The widow in great shame fell prostrate to the ground, begging forgiveness but Ali said, "It is Ali who must feel ashamed at having neglected you."

### **Ali's love of Children**

Ali always showed a great affection for children. Towards the end of his reign, a baby girl was born to him who brought much joy to him at a period of deep depression. He would take her in his lap and her prattle beguiled many a wearisome hours for him. The mother of this child belonged to the tribe of the Banu Kilab and Ali in jest would ask the little one to which tribe she belonged. The child had a lisp which prevented her pronouncing in certain letters. Being unable to say "Kilab" correctly she would imitate the bark of a dog (Kilab being the plural of "Kelb" meaning "dog"). This never failed to put Ali into a jovial mood. He loved all children and was at all times a devoted family man.

### **Ali's wives and children**

Until the death of Fatima, Ali took no other woman to wife. After her death (and he never ceased to mourn her loss), according to the custom of his time he took in all eleven wives, by whom he had fifteen sons and eighteen daughters.

His various wives were:—

1. Fatima'tul-Zuhra, (daughter of the Holy Prophet) who had been

**Ali's generosity and Hospitality**

The Arab saying "generous as Hatim<sup>1</sup>" could well have been amended to "generous as Ali", for Ali exceeded even that famous Bedouine chief in munificence. Ali would often work as a farm-labourer in order to earn money and, on getting wages in the evening, would immediately distribute all he had earned amongst the poor, going home empty-handed. He could not bear to refuse any supplicant and, on occasion would even borrow money in order to give it to others.

Ali used to say, "Woe to that man who spends his wealth in buying male and female slaves but spends not his money on the free-born who, with a little alms would become enslaved in gratitude to him for ever."

justly called "the pride of the fair sex." She gave birth to two daughters and two sons who became the progenitors of the race of Sayyids, the flower of Islamic nobility. (a) Imam Hasan, (b) Imam Hussain, (c) Zaynib, a daughter who was married to Abdullah bin Jafar, and (d) Um Kulthum, who was married to Aun bin Jafar.

2. Umu'-l-Bun' ian, daughter of Kharam bin Khalid, who gave birth to five sons (a) Abdullah, (b) Jafar Akbar, (c) Abbas, (d) Uthman and (e) Umar

3. Khulah bint Jafar who gave birth to one son Muhammad Akbar nicknamed Abdullah Qasim who became famous in history as Muhammad Hanfia.

4. Um Habib daughter of Rabi'a who gave birth to a son Umar and a daughter named Ruqiya.

5. Usuma daughter of Um'mis (the widow of Hazrat Jafar). After the death of Jafar, she married the Caliph Abu Bakr and gave birth to a son named Muhammad bin Abu Bakr. When Abu Bakr died, she married Ali and gave birth to two sons Yahya and Muhammad Asghar.

6. Um Saeed daughter of Urwa who gave birth to seven daughters (a) Nafisa, (b) Zaynib Sughra (the younger Zaynib), (c) Ruqiya Kubra (the elder Ruqiya), (d) Um-ul-Karam, (e) Humara, (f) Um Salma, (g) Ruqiya Sughra (younger Ruqiya)

7. Um Shai'ab Mukhzoma'ia who gave birth to two daughters (a) Um-Ul-Hasan, and (b) Rum'ia.

8. Humla daughter of Musro'q who gave birth to two sons (a) Abu Bakr and (b) Abdullah.

9. Usama daughter of Abi-ul-A's who gave birth to a son, Muhammad.

10. Muhyata daughter of Umra-ul-Qais, who gave birth to five daughters. (a) Khadija, (b) Imam Hani, (c) Tamima, (d) Ma'mun'a, and (e) Fatima.

11. Leile daughter of Masud Urmey's who gave birth to two sons (a) Muhammad Asghar and (b) Abu Abdullah.

1. Hatim was a Bedouine Chief of the famous Tay tribe whose fame for boundless generosity had spread far and wide. He was a contemporary of the Holy Prophet, and his various philanthropic achievements have been recorded in books. The phrase 'generous like Hatim' is used extensively throughout the Eastern countries and has almost become a common place saying.

Whenever Ali participated in any one's funeral-prayers he used to ask his survivors if the deceased was in debt and if informed in the affirmative, Ali would pay and clear his debts.

One day, when Ali had no food in the house, he was forced to go out and sell his sword to raise money for provisions. On his way home with the money his path crossed that of a band of beggars, to whom he gave all the money he had, returning home empty-handed. On another occasion a supplicant went to the house of the Holy Prophet to beg for food and there was none in the house. On being told of this by his wives, the Holy Prophet asked, "Is there any one here who can give relief to this man. "At once Ali offered to take the beggar home to his house. There Fatima said that there was nothing in the house except a few cakes she had baked for the children. "But, said she," give them to the beggar for I would rather see my children go hungry than refuse a supplicant. "According to the Shi'ite traditions the following verse of the Qur'an was then revealed:—

- "9. They prefer the supplicant to themselves, even though they may be hungry themselves. And whoso is rid of the covetousness of his own soul...it is these who will be successful." (59:9)

Abul Tufail Naqil, a contemporary of Ali narrates, "I saw Ali putting honey in the mouth of orphans and speaking kindly to them in such a way that some of his companions could not but exclaim, 'Alas! We should have been orphans to beget the love of the Imam'."

On another occasion a supplicant approached Ali and asked him to give him some bread. Ali ordered his slave Qunbur to look to his requirements. Qunbur came to Ali and said, My Lord, the bread is in the saddle bag." Then said Ali "Give him the saddle along with the bread. At this Qunbur said, "Sir, the saddle is on the camel." "Then give him the camel as well" was the reply. "But, my Lord" said Qunbur

"the camel is in the row of camels." "Then" said Ali, "Give him all the camels that form the row". Qanbur without a moment's delay turned over the entire row of the camels to the suppliant murmuring that any further delay might actuate the Caliph to order that he himself (Qunbur) should also be given to the suppliant.

Thousands of such stories have been recorded in which Ali is said to have sold his coat of mail, sword, wearing apparel and the ornaments of his wives to fulfil the needs of a suppliant. Ali's generosity frequently took the form of hospitality, his views on that subject being clearly expressed in his famous saying, "Verily that man is debased in the sight of God who seldom receives any guest." One day, when Ali was sitting dispirited and dejected, someone asked him the cause of his sadness. "O! I have not received any guests since last week" was the reply. Ali himself lived on dry crusts of bread and so dined separately from his guests whom he caused to be served with more elaborate food. On the arrival of a guest Ali would rise up to receive him and would himself pour water on to the hands of the guest. He would make him sit down in the centre of the carpet and attend personally to his wants. Ali used to say that it gave him the greatest pleasure to serve his guest himself.

### **The Asceticism of Ali's life**

A letter written by Ali to his provincial governor, Sahl ibn Hanif, tells us much of the way in which Ali lived:—

"You know very well that your Caliph has selected for himself two sheets of clothes as wearing apparel, two home-made cakes for his food, and excepting once a year during I'du'l Zuha (when the Muslim kill goats, lambs, cows as an offering to God) he has never taken meat, has broken his fast with only a dry crust of bread, and has failed to provide the amenities of life for his sons and daughter. It similarly behoves you to make your

life simple. By God, I have neither collected gold in this world nor hoarded any wealth from my share of booty nor have collected any wearing garments except the two sheets that I put on my person, nor do I possess an inch of land which I may call my own."

Ali used to wear the coarsest and cheapest clothes which looked all the more shabby because of the number of patches on them. His worn-out shirts were far inferior to the wearing apparel of his servants and subordinates. Never in his life did he have more than two sets of clothing which he wore until they were in rags. When a courtier called Umar bin Qais, once asked Ali why he always wore such shabby and worn-out shirts he received the reply, "Verily such garments soften the heart and it behoves the believers to do the same."

The story is told of how, one day Ali, accompanied by his household page Qunbur, went to the central bazar of Kufa where they bought two pieces of cloth, the one at two dirhems and the other at three dirhems per yard. When he returned home, he offered Qunbur the dearer piece of cloth, to which the latter took objection, saying "My Lord! You must have the dearer piece of cloth because you receive ambassadors, hold courts, address the congregation and perform the multifarious duties of a Caliph". At this Ali smiled and said, "O Qunbur! Young as you are, the dearer cloth will suit you better than me." So saying he gave the cloth to Qunbur.

We are told too, how one cold evening when Ali lay shivering wrapped in an old linen sheet, one of his courtiers came to him and said, "O Commander of the Faithful, God has ordained an equal share for you and your family from the "Bait-ul-Mal" (House of Public Property) then why do you not take your fair share from it, as other men do, rather than suffer these unnecessary privations". Ali replied, "By God, I do not want to take anything from the Public Treasury. This sheet in which I am wrapped is the one which I brought from Medina at the time when I first came to Kufa.

We are further informed that, at the time of Ali's marriage with Leila, daughter of Masud, the bride's father prepared a luxurious room for the bridegroom. Ali on entering the room, ordered all the refinements to be removed, "For" said he, "I will feel better (at home) in the state in which I am (accustomed to live)."

When Abdullah ibn Abbas, a cousin of Ali, was visiting him one day he found Ali sitting on the floor busily patching a shoe. Abdullah asked the Caliph what would be the price of a new pair of shoes, to which Ali replied, "This shoe is dearer to me than all the things of this world, because it pinches me if I do anything wrong. It tells me to stick to the right. The Holy Prophet used to put patches on his own clothes, mend his own shoes, and ride on a mule to which he gave fodder with his own hands, and often times made another person sit behind him on the camel."

Another story tells how once, when Saweed bin Ghufila went to see Ali, he found his Caliph sitting on an old worn-out rug. After saluting Ali Saweed said, "O thou Imam of the Believers, the sovereign of the Muslims, the owner of "Bait-ul-Mal", the Commander of the Faithful, who receives ambassadors from foreign countries, have you nothing better in the house to sit on than this torn piece of matting." Ali replied, "O Saweed! The wise are never beguiled by the charms of a temporary abode. . . . . a sojourn from which one has to depart soon. My eyes can well picture that house where one has to live for ever and it is for the decoration of that place I am shifting my goods. In a short time indeed I will migrate to that house to live there for ever." At this Saweed wept bitterly.

Ali would never, under any circumstances, depart from the ascetic discipline which he imposed on himself. A courtier of his, Umar bin Harees related how once, when he was having the evening meal with Ali a sealed bag was brought to the Caliph. Ali himself broke the seal of the bag, which proved to contain nothing but some stale crusts of breads, as dry and hard as stone.

At the sight of such unpalatable food Umar reprimanded Ali's maidservant, Fida, who was serving the meal. "Are you not ashamed", said he, "to serve such bad food to the Commander of the Faithful?" Fida said, "I could easily have prepared dainty dishes for my master but he has ordered me never to prepare sumptuous meals for him. My master collects all the crusts of bread and puts them in that bag. I used, stealthily to slip in some pieces of fresh bread, which would be tasty and more easily digestible, but my master soon detected what I was doing. Eversince he has collected the crusts himself, put them in this bag and sealed it so that no one could tamper with it."

Umar bin Harees goes on to report how Ali took the crusts, softened them in a bowl of water, sprinkled them with salt and, after eating them, offered thanks to God, saying "Praised be God for his favours." To his courtier's question as to whether he could long survive on such a meagre diet Ali replied, "Such food fills my belly very adequately. God forbid that I should indulge in sumptuous repasts, which are bound to take one to hell."

One scorching day in Summer, Ali refused a glass of "Sherbat" for similar reasons, saying, "Though God has not decreed this drink unlawful for men, refrain from taking it for fear of becoming accustomed to such dainties".

On another occasion Saweed bin Ghufila advised Ali's maidservant Fida to take pity on the Caliph's old age and to give him something more nourishing. Ali overheard this talk and said, "O Saweed! This food (of crusts) is good enough for me. The Holy Prophet used to take similar food. If I become accustomed to dainties, how can I hope to enter Paradise, there to live with the Apostle of God. The Holy Prophet never took fresh wheat cakes, and brown barley-flour was his chief diet. I remember how I was hungry on a certain day and I went out and did labourer's work on an adjoining farm for a woman who agreed to give me a date for each

bucket of water that I fetched for her. I carried sixteen buckets of water for her, earning sixteen dates which I shared with the Prophet. I prefer such food."

### **Ali's Humility**

Humble himself, Ali hated pomp and arrogance. Even as Caliph he used to sweep the floor of his own house, chop wood for fuel, carry water on his shoulders, mend his own shoes, wash his own clothes and milk his goat. Ali's wife Fatima did similar domestic jobs with her own hands, grinding wheat in the hand-mill, baking bread, lighting the oven, washing the dishes and tending her children.

Returning one day with some dates from the bazar, he received many offers from people anxious to carry them for him. Ali refused them all, saying. "Whosoever is responsible for looking after his children, has the bigger responsibility of carrying the burden himself." Ali was often seen walking barefoot and on one occasion when he happened to be riding a horse he was distressed to find people following him on foot. Asking them what they wanted, he was told that they felt elated by walking in his retinue. To this Ali replied "Go back to your business. By walking behind a rider, you will breed feelings of inferiority in yourselves and infect me with arrogance."

On another occasion when Ali was discussing the essential qualities of a ruler in a Khutba, a member of the congregation rose and praised Ali for his eloquence. Ali said that his subjects ought not to praise him, for he wanted no flattery, being all too conscious of his own unworthiness. Concluding his sermon he said, "To a person who has been influenced by the superb Majesty of God, every thing else appears petty and frivolous. He looks upon all other things as shallow and trivial. The worst ruler is one who is given to pride and arrogance and hears flattering words from other. All praise is due to God. You should not praise me because I

herewith declare before God and all of you that are here that I have many responsibilities which lie still undischarged. In the face of it how can any one applaud me and consider me praiseworthy? You should not accord me that treatment which is only befitting to tyrants. Neither become afraid of me nor ever hesitate to tell the truth. Do not show any consideration to me If I am found wanting in justice, and never conceal truth from me. I cannot trust any flatterer because he might mislead me and his tempting talk might beguile me into vainglory. I pray to God to save me from an erroneous path. We men are all alike and there is no other master than God."

### **Ali's Patience**

Another virtue, which Ali possessed in full measure was patience, which earned him the title of a "Second Job". Of his patience in the face of physical suffering the following story may serve as an example:—

In the battle of Uhud, Ali received some sixty-one wounds on his person and when brought to the Prophet's camp, even Um Salim and Um A'tiya the Muslim nurses refused to dress so many wounds saying that the whole body of Ali looked like one big wound so how could they begin to tackle it. The Holy Prophet then himself washed all the wounds, dressed them and said, "That very God in whose cause Ali had sustained injuries will heal them." Ali although in mortal agony, replied: "May God grant me patience to bear this suffering. Is it not a favour of God that he gave me the courage to stand and fight and not to leave the field?"

When the Holy Prophet broke the sad news of his brother Jafar's death to Ali, the latter bore the tidings patiently without a murmur. According to the Shi'ite legends, God revealed the following verse of the Qur'an

at that juncture:—

- “155. And We will try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of wealth, and lives and fruits: but give good tidings to the patient.”
- “156. Who, when a misfortune overtakes them say, “Surely, to Allah we belong and to Him shall we return.” (2:155-156)

Ali used to say that, at no time in his life, had he ever known peace and tranquillity. From the time that he went, in infancy, to the home of the Holy Prophet it was a ferment of turbulence and turmoil. The Holy Prophet was constantly persecuted by the Meccan pagans. Then, from adolescence onwards, Ali was constantly fighting in Jihad (crusades); and after the death of the Holy Prophet he was embroiled, against his will, in the political intrigues of others, his rights were questioned, set at naught and usurped. Even when elected Caliph, the implacable enemies of Islam arose and rebelled against him yet he bore all these afflictions with patience, thanking God that he had acquitted himself well in the tests and trials to which the Almighty had thought fit to subject him.

### **Ali's Forbearance and Unbounded Mercy**

After the Holy Prophet, if any one was praised for the nobility of his nature it was Ali. Not only was he gentle and affectionate towards his friends, but his kindness and lack of vindictiveness towards his enemies have become proverbial. His treatment of Merwan, the first cousin and secretary of Caliph Uthman, is one outstanding example of his clemency. Merwan had played a prominent part in inciting the rebels to take the field against Ali, yet when he was brought before Ali as a prisoner, after the Battle of Camel, Ali forgave him and set him at liberty without exacting any ransom.

His refusal to deny water to Mu'awiya's troops at Siffin, even though Mu'awiya had attempted to cut off

all supplies from his own men, is an even more forbearing and famous example of his humane treatment towards his fellow-men, whether they were friends or foes. "The water", said Ali, "belongs to God and God alone and every living creature, man, bird and beast, has the right to it. Go on and fetch as much water as you can." (Tarikh Kamal).

The habit of mutilating the corpses of the enemy was particularly abhorrent to Ali, who utterly forbade his men to touch the bodies of the enemy dead. Nor did he allow them to possess themselves of horse, the arms or accoutrements of the slain, a departure from custom which met with considerable opposition from his own troops.

On one occasion when the wealthy Umar bin Ubda fell by Ali's sword, an old Arab chief, observing that Ali did not touch the precious coat of mail, lost his temper and said, "This is a penny-wise and pound foolish policy which cannot be justified on any grounds." Ali, however kept silent. When Umar bin Ubda's sister came to the battlefield and saw the dead body of her brother still clothed in his armour and un mutilated, instead of weeping as was the custom of the Arab women, she uttered the following verses:—

"Had Umar's murderer been any one else;  
Save the one that killed him,  
I would have wept upto eternity;  
But his murderer is a gentleman;  
In whom no one can find any fault;  
Surely he is the son of a gentleman;  
A Sire, who is the light of the city.

Ali repeatedly enjoined his troops not to despoil the corpses of their enemies saying, "Never make naked the slain on the battlefield. The lion who enters the battlefield, either kills others or himself gets killed. He never bothers about the booty." In the thick of a battle, if Ali's opponent broke his sword, he would stop fighting until he had given his adversary a weapon to resume.

Mercy and love for his fellow men were so deep rooted in Ali's character that they had become second nature to him. He could not bear to look on the sufferings of others. When Ibn Muljam, the assailant who had fatally wounded Ali with his poisoned sword was brought before him as a prisoner Ali saw to it that his enemy's thirst was quenched and hunger satisfied, refusing to drink or eat in front of him until he had been fed.

On one occasion Mu'awiya is said to have asked Khalid bin Yamit why he held Ali so dear, and to have received as answer, "I love Ali for he never ceases to be merciful even when he is angered, is never less than righteous in conversation and is unfailingly just when deciding a case."

When Mu'awiya was harassing Ali's subjects by making continual border raids, Ali's governor, Kameel bin Ziyad suggested that Ali should allow him to lead rétributive expeditions into Syria to spread similar alarm and despondency amongst Mu'awiya's subjects. To this proposal Ali replied, "Two wrongs cannot make a right. Mu'awiya may take pleasure in harassing and oppressing God's innocent men, how can I resort to such measures?"

Innumerable acts have been recorded of Ali's kindness on the actual field of battle. After the battle of Camel Ali gave decent burial to all the enemy dead while to Ayesha, he gave liberty and safe conduct back to Mecca. During the water shortage at Siffin he refused to quench his own thirst while his soldiers were parched saying, "Give this water to one who is thirstier than I."

Consideration for his subordinates, clemency towards a fallen foe, benevolence towards those who remained inimical to him, moderation towards those who intrigued against his life, these were some of Ali's many virtues, born of his unbounded love for humanity.

Among his Muslim enemies Ali's humanity was frequently and wrongly interpreted as a sign of weakness. It is perhaps significant, however, that his non-

Muslim Persian subjects, who shared in the extreme generosity with which he had treated the rebellious Persian provinces, remembered his reign as one akin to that of their Sassanian ruler An-Nushirwan, the Just.

### **Protection for Illegitimate Children**

Ali's humane nature also showed itself in the decrees he enforced to protect illegitimate children from cruelty and hardship. Until the reign of Ali, a woman pregnant with an illegitimate child was punished for her adultery. The Caliph maintained that no harm ought to come to the innocent child in the womb. Accordingly the bastard children were declared innocent and taken, from birth, into the care of the State, which not only fed and clothed them, but also saw to it that they got some education.

### **Care of Prisoners**

Another social reform introduced in the reign of Ali was concerning the welfare of prisoners. Rich prisoners, in jail for offences for which the crown was prosecutor, were expected to pay for their food: but poor people, no matter what their crimes had been, were fed from money provided by the State Treasurer.

### **Reforms and Social Justice**

Ali's ideas of social justice were all based on the laws which had been revealed in the Holy Qur'an. He did not care a whit for the clap-trap of tribal custom and threw out many of the pagan practices which, belonging properly to the 'Age of Ignorance', had begun to creep back into Arab life since the death of the Holy Prophet.

The core of Ali's ethical pronouncements was his interpretation of "Ummah", the Islamic community, which he conceived of as an organic entity capable of

possessing moral and spiritual qualities. An individual could not lead his life in isolation but ought to live as part of the "Ummah", safeguarding the "Haqooq'l Abad" (duties of individuals towards their fellow men), as ordained in the Qur'an. This could only be achieved by developing a sense of group-solidarity and loyalty and by each person striving to live in harmony with his fellows without encroaching upon or usurping the rights of others.

"Mankind" said Ali, "with all its spiritual faults and moral vices would lead to a crisis of the nations and could only survive by a corporate sense of responsibility. Individual responsibility would positively avouch solidarity."

On the other hand, Ali realised that personal traits of character in individuals could exercise an influence over the life of the community. For this reason Ali urged the strong not to transgress the rights of the weak and he passed many decrees to safeguard the interests of the weaker members. He further held that a good government should not only be regulative but also reformative in its application. He defined the State as "a community in action" and the government as instrumental in achieving that end. A righteous government meant a righteous Caliph, for the Caliph was the agent of the community, charged to fulfil the responsibilities imposed on him by its moral laws.

Only by rightfully observing the "Haqooq'l Abad" or "the social duties of the individuals" could a man perform "Haqooqu'l Allah" (duties and obligations to God). If men were found wanting in their duties towards God. He was Merciful enough to forgive them; but the violation of the rights of individuals involved infringements of the laws of society and the guilty parties could only be forgiven by those whom they had wronged.

### **Ali as Chief Justice**

The keen eye of the Holy Prophet had early dis-

cerned in Ali all those potentialities of wisdom, moderation, foresight and impartiality that go to the making of a good judge. Ali was first made Chief Justice during the Ministry of the Holy Prophet, an office which he held under the three men who preceeded him as Caliph. For fifteen years Ali had striven assiduously to establish the 'Ummah' as a corporate entity in right relationship with God, and with faith in God permeating every part of daily living. "Fear none but God" was the principle upon which Ali acted as judge, a principle which enabled him to dispense judgment impartially.

### **Famous Judgements of Ali**

*Judgements*

Some of the judgments of Ali have made legal history. For example, in the reign of Umar a case was brought before him in which two men entrusted their goods to a woman on the express understanding that the goods were not to be returned unless both of them came jointly to fetch them back. After some time one of them came to the woman and deposed on solemn affirmation that his other friend had died and that the goods should be returned to him. In vain did the woman object to the return of goods but at the intervention of some of the local inhabitants she at long last agreed to return the goods to the claimant.

After a few weeks the man reported dead came to the woman to demand the goods deposited with her in trust. When the woman informed him that his other friend had taken them back, he took case to the court of Caliph Umar. The Caliph in great wrath held the woman responsible for the loss and said, "Why did you return the goods to a single man when they had definitely laid down the condition that they should receive the goods jointly." The woman pleaded her innocence and produced witnesses to establish her bonafide intentions. The Caliph was in a great fix and he referred the case to his Chief Justice, Ali. Ali needed to give the case only one hearing. First he asked the plaintiff,

"Did you lay down the conditions with the accused, while entrusting the goods to her for safe deposit, that she should hold them in trust for you both and, that she was to only give the goods jointly to both of you and not individually?" "Yes, your worship. This was the very condition" was the reply. "Well" said Ali, "Bring your other friend here so that the aforesaid goods may be delivered to you jointly." In the silence which fell on the court room it would have been possible to hear a pin drop. With downcast eyes the plaintiff silently left the court room, realising that Ali had at once detected the ruse by which he too had wanted to cheat both his friend and the woman.

The fame of Ali's impartiality as Chief Justice spread far and wide. Had circumstances allowed him to reign peaceably the world would have witnessed a unique combination of divine and secular justice. In the cases which were brought to his court, Ali made no distinction between friend or foe, between his own relatives and persons unknown to him.

An interesting story is told of a case in which Ali was himself the plaintiff. It concerned a valuable coat of mail, lost by Ali at Siffin and picked up by a Christian who then wore it himself. Ali recognising his armour on the Christian, took the miscreant to the Qadi of the city, demanding that the culprit should be dealt with according to the law. When the Qadi asked the prisoner if it belonged to him the prisoner pleaded "not guilty" saying "My possession of it is clear proof of my ownership." The Qadi then asked Ali to substantiate his charge by producing witnesses, which Ali was unable to do. The Qadi was now in a great fix for he was loathe to accuse Ali of having brought a false charge against the Christian yet unable to convict the accused for lack of proof. Seeing the dilemma in which the Qadi found himself Ali said. "The Judge ought not to be influenced by the dignity of any party; merit alone should be the criterion for deciding any issue." Summoning up his courage the Qadi then pronounced judgment

as follows:—

“In the absence of any conclusive evidence—and this the Caliph has failed to produce—the suit is dismissed.”

The Christian walked out of the court a free man but after going only a few paces he turned back and, going up to Ali, said, “O Commander of the Faithful, verily the coat of mail is yours. I got it on the battlefield of Siffin. I only wanted to see how judicial cases are decided in your courts. My Lord, pray stretch forth your hand for I intend to take the oath of allegiance and accept Islam at your hands.” So saying he took the oath of fealty to Ali, and accepted Islam. Ali then presented to him that same coat of mail and also a horse, saying “Blessed are thou indeed. Previously thou wert a soldier of a secular king but henceforth thou hast accepted enlistment as a soldier of God.” The new convert is said to have joined Ali’s army, fighting in all Ali’s battles until on the battlefield of Nahrawan he was killed, thus obtaining a martyr’s crown.

Ali was also very concerned that his magistrates should also follow the principle of strictest impartiality, issuing very strict instructions that they should never take bribes and never pronounce judgments until they were fully satisfied with the merits of the case.

### **Punishment as a Deterrent**

In spite of his humane attitude to his fellow-beings, Ali believed in the use of punishment as a deterrent and was not averse to meting out drastic punishments to those who were found defiantly bold and lawless in their doings, repeatedly disobedient or unrepentantly licentious. These punishments were often retaliatory in character as being the kind the criminals would be mostly likely to understand. In this Ali was retaining the policy of Umar, who was the first to resort to such violent and vigorous measures.

**Ali as an Administrator**

During the lifetime of the Holy Prophet Ali gained a great deal of administrative experience. As Caliph his letters to his provincial governors and district officers show how well aware he was of the temptations and procrastinations that beset the administrative official everywhere. His orders emphasised the need to be prompt in correspondence, and district officers were warned to be quick in carrying out the orders of the central government and prompt to succour the helpless and needy, and never to put off till tomorrow the work they could do that day. He asked his governors not to keep their subjects at arm's length and not to retain guards at their residence but to let everyone have free access to them at all times. He also advised them to disguise themselves and go freely amongst their subjects so that they could acquaint themselves with the true conditions of the people. They were further expected to develop the economic resources of their territory and above all they were to refrain from accepting any bribe or illegal gratification whatsoever.

At one time, a deputation of men waited on Ali and in their interview with the Caliph complained against the high handed measures of their provincial governor Ziyad bin Simeyah, at which Ali wrote the following letter to him:—

"I have received a serious complaint against thee and if it is true, then thou hast certainly displeased Almighty God, defied thy Caliph, debased thy integrity and defamed thy good name. It is high time that thou should report to me with thy account books and ledgers."

Ali also laid great emphasis on the need for dealing speedily with all complaints, holding that justice delayed was in itself a grave injustice and was equivalent to justice being denied.

**Ali's Courage and Intrepidity**

Ali spent his youth in the shadow of the sword and

his early manhood in wielding it. He quickly proved himself a great leader of men, possessed not only of a strong right arm but also of the brain needed to plan campaigns and the personality to inspire those he commanded. He possessed, too, and in more than usual measure, a high degree of personal courage. Never once did he retreat or turn his back on the enemy. In single combat he never allowed himself to be overawed by the prowess of his opponent, and in general battle the numerical superiority of the enemy forces did not influence his decisions. On several occasions Ali fought single-handed against overwhelming odds and emerged out victorious. At the battle of Siffin he penetrated into the front ranks of the Syrian forces, dressed only in a cotton uniform and without any protective armour. One after another his assailants fell before the fury of his onslaught and when Hasan, (Ali's son) said to him, "O father, is this the way for the Believers to acquit themselves?" Ali replied "Yes my son. It is immaterial to your father whether he falls on death or death falls on him. I love death as much as a suckling babe loves the milk of his mother."

In the thick of battle Ali was wont to encourage the flagging spirits of his men by shouting in a tremendous voice, "O thou men! If you do not fall in this battle even then death is bound to overtake you. I swear by Almighty God that Ali would prefer a death from the sword-strokes of his enemies to lying in bed amidst ailments and giving up his ghost after suffering for several months."

Once a soldier asked Ali why he preferred a mule to a horse when going into action. Ali replied, "A horse can gallop at a great pace, but a mule only ambles along, faltering little in its slow and steady pace. As I have neither to chase one who flies from the battlefield nor any inclination to seek safety in flight myself, I prefer a mule to a horse."

For much the same reason Ali wore protective armour on the front part of his body only, while his back

lay open and unprotected. Some one asked him, "Are you not afraid that you will be attacked from behind?" "God forbid," was Ali's reply, "that I may live to see the day when an enemy would have the dexterity to attack me from the rear."

### **Ali's Code of Chivalry**

Ali's ferocity on the field of battle seems, at first sight, to be strangely at odds with his gentleness on all other occasions until one recalls that, although his mighty blows frequently cleft his enemies in two, he never departed from his own chivalrous code. This code of chivalry is admirably summed up in the instructions which he gave to his son, Muhammad ibn Hanfia, on presenting him with the flag of command at the battle of Siffin:-

O son! Let the mountains move from their places but your foot should not falter from that place that has been assigned to you in the battlefield. Instal your feet firmly on the ground as though a nail had been driven into it. Let your one jaw of teeth rest firmly on the other jaw. Keep an eye on the rear of your enemy. Enter the battle with a firm determination that you have sold your head to God. With all this, always think that success lies in the hands of God. Above all never raise your hand against the sick, women, aged and children. Even if they abuse you, it behoves you to give them refuge. Never mutilate the limbs of the enemy or any other person. Give decent burial to the dead bodies of your enemies."

Ali's own behaviour at the Battle of the Ditch also illustrates his adherence to this code. While fighting a duel Ali had thrown his opponent, Umar on the ground and had drawn his sword to cut off his head, when the latter spat on his face. Ali then left his enemy and sheathed his sword. Asked why he left such a dangerous foe alive, Ali said, "I would have killed Umar in the way of God, but when he spat on my

face, I lost my temper and his death at that juncture would have been caused from motives of retaliation rather than in the spirit of Jihad."

### **Ali's Mysticism and consciousness of God**

Though he cannot be considered as a Prophet, for Muhammad (may peace be upon him) had categorically stated that he was the last of the long line of Prophets and 'the final Seal of prophethood' Ali was nevertheless the ALTER Ego of the Holy Prophets' spirit. He was the first to lay down the fundamentals of the mystical conception of God, which were later to be formulated as the science of "Tasawwuf" (mysticism). He was personally aware of a sense of oneness with God and of the divine unity behind all the diversity of this world of men. Although Ali's approach to God was from the door of mysticism, yet he never forgot to stress the practical implications of this side.

Ali possessed to a remarkable degree what theologians call "God consciousness", but his awareness of God was no isolated, sterile escape from the world. Rather he saw God as omnipresent in the world. He realised that the rise and fall of nations was an inevitable phenomenon and that permanence in human affairs could only be achieved by obeying divine decrees. He was not a visionary but self-introspection had convinced him that God's Kingdom would be established on earth and all the nations would be at peace and in a condition of bliss, but this could only materialise when every nation had accepted Islam.

All his sermons stressed the need for men to act in such a way as to hasten the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. That was why Ali laid so much emphasis on men to live in right relationship with each other which was a necessary requisite for establishing right relationship with God. On the other hand Ali made it clear that nearness to God could not be attained by rank or secular glory but by service and sacrifice

alone, for said he, "to get into Allah's kingdom there can be no precedence of birth, wealth, rank and position but He judges men for the life that they live in the service of others. It is one's actions that ensure entrance to Paradise and not a lip-service confession of the formulæ and doctrines of Islam". The stress was laid on sympathy, service and self-sacrifice as the principal means of attaining heavenly bliss. Ali's sermons exhorted, "let us all bow down to the will of God, the fulfilment of which lies in the service of fellow-brethren, succour of the needy and fallen, care of the sick and afflicted and veneration of the aged and infirm."

Because of Ali's piety and consciousness of God he had been called the "Imamu'l Muttaqeen" (the leader of the pious). The Holy Prophet used to call him "Leader of the Holy of Holies" while Shi'ite traditions see him as the torch of light in the darkness, the "Faroc-i-Azim" (discriminator of Truth from Falsehood), the "Waris-i-Alu'm-i-Anbeya" (inheritor and witness of Divine Knowledge) and the "Sage-i-Kothur" (the distributor of water from the stream of Heaven). Because of his nearness to God he is also unanimously regarded as the "Emperor of Saints" without whose intervention no one can become "Wali" (saint).

### **Some of Ali's Counsels on Religion**

As in all Semitic religions, so too in Islam, we find that its founder was constrained to use the language of sensuous imagery in an endeavour to make its doctrines intelligible to the layman. Ali, employed the same terminology and avoided metaphysical discussions by adopting a practical basis for all his expositions. He explained the origin of things. Heaven and Hell, the doctrine of retribution and all the tenets of Islam in the plainest and simplest language so that they could be understood by even the most untutored of the Believers.

Ali's commentaries established God as a King who

sat enthroned in Heaven and judged men according to their actions. Nothing was hidden from God and he knew the innermost secrets of men's hearts. The freedom, spontaneity and catholicity of Islamic teaching would ultimately and inevitably lead to the establishment of a permanent kingdom of God. Death and decay of the flesh served but to open the door on a new Life-after-Death, a state of everlasting bliss which would transcend mortality, an Ultimate Reality which would endure for ever. Life in Heaven would be life Everlasting.

The doctrine of Renunciation played no part in Ali's counsels. He advised men not to love this world but he did not advise them to renounce it. On the contrary he urged them to live their life on earth in an orderly way so that they might better the lot of everyone in this world as a preparation for a happy life in the next world. In one of his sermons he gave the following advice:—

“O men of God! May God keep you happy and shower his favours upon you! You should prepare yourselves for the long journey that awaits you. There are many difficulties that beset your path. Death is ever anxious to devour you. Renounce the riches of the world and catch hold of piety. Life in this world is short whereas life after death will be everlasting. Buy those commodities here (in this world) which will stand you in good stead in the other. Do not demean yourself before God, who is well acquainted with your innermost feelings. Do not allow your soul to be lost in this world before death may overtake you. O men! Cast a glance on this world from a wise man's point of view. She (the world) turns out her guests in a short space of time. She harasses those with whom she fondles and prattles. Whatever part of life is wasted in idle pursuits can never be recalled. Its (world's) gratifications and enjoyments are soon changed into sufferings and pain, its embellishments and decorations into deformation and impoverishment. The days of this life are numbered.

Death is inevitable and is bound to come soon. After having adorned your person with good deeds you should not pay any heed whether death catches you or you catch death. Many men buy clothes, which instead of being worn by them are used in their coffin. Many men build houses which instead of becoming abodes become their graves. No one has lived for ever in this world and no one has invented such a medicine which may make men immune from the clutches of death. Solomon the Prophet reigned with great pomp and majesty but when his time came he had to depart (from this world). The world was left without him and his palaces are nothing but a heap of ruins. (Take the case) of those men who lived in impregnable citadels on the top of mountains with the most powerful army and when their time came death ejected them from those fortified places and put them to eternal sleep in graves. One can hear the whisper of the angels over their graves: "Where are those stiffnecked people who boasted of their pelf and power and their crowns and thrones? Where are their royal robes? What became of those beauties whose radiance under veils dimmed the light of (the sun) in this world? Where have gone those forts which were decorated with golden curtains, in front of which stood sentries (for watch and ward)? Do not they tell us how powerless they were? Have not the worms eaten those gormandisers, who a few days ago set a magnificent and sumptuous table with luxurious plates? The vicissitudes of fortune have ruined their citadels, destroyed their royal robes and reduced to dust their crown and thrones?"

Thus Ali's definition of Monotheism was not Metaphysical but ethical. From the diverse fragments of Ali's writings and sermons the Shias draw a whole moral code, sifting out of the great body of material he left behind a close-knit theology which the Shian-i-Ali (followers of Ali) have always maintained propounds the only valid experience of Islam.

**Ali's Virtues**

All Ali's virtues sprung from his love of God which was reflected in his love for all God's creatures. Ali loved the whole of humanity and his catholic sympathies embraced all races and all creeds. The doors of "Baytu'l Mal" were open to the destitute of every caste, creed, race and colour.

It was because of his love of his fellow-men that he did everything he could to avoid Civil War, despatching envoy after envoy with messages of peace to even his most bitter enemies, showing towards them a tenderness of mind and spirit which, in those harsh times, was wrongly regarded as weakness and which was ultimately to lead to his downfall.

## CHAPTER XXIII

## LITERARY ACHIEVEMENTS

**Ali an Encyclopaedia of Learning**

Ali was a living encyclopaedia of learning, about whom the Holy Prophet said, "If I am the city of Knowledge verily Ali is the gate of it." According to the Shi'ite legends he was the first "Imam" of Islam. Possessed of a prodigious memory he had learned the whole of the Qura'an by heart, to become the acknowledged authority on it. He also exhibited talents in all other fields of literature, including Arabic philology and poetry. In the storehouse of his brain was a vast stock of stories, limericks and riddles. Few have been endowed with talents such as his. Those sermons and writings which have come down to us show him to have been unique in his mastery of Arabic rhetoric and eloquence. They are rich in imagery and forceful in expression, the rhythm and power of his words flowing like a torrent from a high mountain to the valley below. Similes and metaphor pour forth to be resolved at last in the slow-moving clarity of the logical and systematic conclusions to which he always brought his arguments.

**Ali's Collected Works**

Ali's works have been collected into a vast compendium called the *Najh-tu'l-Bulagha*, an anthology of his sermons, letters, utterances on all sorts of occasions, exhortations, complaints, advice, judgments on penal, civil and commercial law, proposed solutions of fiscal

and economic problems, and what might today be called psychological discussions. There was no topic on which Ali could not express himself and his letters to contemporary rulers and his addresses on "Jihad" have become imperishable classics.

In its import and sanctity the work is regarded by the Shias as second only to the Qur'an and the "Sunna" of the Holy Prophet.

### **Ali's Literary Style**

Ali developed a highly individual style, discarding the high flown and elaborate forms which had hitherto been a convention of Arabic literature in favour of the flexibility and vigour of everyday speech. He spoke, and wrote, in the language current amongst the masses; he also delighted in coining a new word or phrase, often with great wit and humour. More than any other religious teacher or preacher, he possessed the common touch, the power to stir the human heart.

### **Authenticity of the Contents of the Najh-tu'l-Bulagha**

This anthology of Ali's works which epitomises the divine knowledge which Ali received from his Master, is greatly venerated by the Arabs who consider every word of it worthy to be weighed in gold. The work contains, (1) Ali's discourses, speeches and addresses.

(2) The letters which he wrote to his contemporaries,

(3) Ali's aphorisms and witty maxims,

(4) Ali's mystic sermons in which he so elaborately explained the doctrines of "Tauheed" (monotheism) and other tenets of Islam.

These addresses, letters and pithy sayings were collected and edited by Sharif Rudi in the tenth century A.D. This work recalls a long-drawn controversy which still lingers between two major sects of Islam—the Shias and the Sunnis. The former maintain that the entire

work is of Ali—that super-man genius who, as wisdom personified, had illumined humanity by those sermons in which he made clear as crystal the Islamic code of Ethics and which portrayed Islamic virtues and Islamic ideals. In the eyes of the Sunnis, Ali was not the author of the entire *Najh-tu'l-Bulagha*. One of the first Sunni writers to challenge the authenticity of this work was Ibn Khallikan since which time a number of Sunni critics have questioned the validity of this work, maintaining that several of the addresses are nothing short of forgeries, especially fabricated by the Shias in order to legalise their doctrinal differences and not from the pen of Ali at all. We need not enter here into the controversy. Suffice it to say that it is generally presumed that by far the major portion of this work is from the pen or mouth of Ali. The book itself gives a most valuable and vivid picture of Arab life during Ali's reign.

Masudi records that, during his lifetime, Ali delivered some 500 addresses which the people learned by heart, passing them on from one generation to another by word or mouth until they were collected by Sharif Rudi towards the end of the tenth century A.D. Rudi was himself considered a literary genius, by his contemporaries and the publication of this work gave rise to a number of contemporary commentaries by scholars, copies of more than three dozen of which still exist.

### **The Addresses and Sermons**

Ali's sermons and addresses dwelt at length on human tragedy and display a fierce hatred of injustice, hypocrisy and the lust for self-aggrandizement. Many of the utterances border on pessimism, which may well be accounted for by the failure of his own political life. In his sermons Ali has tried to show the worthlessness of vice and folly and to lay bare the blessings of virtue. Herein lay the seeds of "Sufism" because of the esoteric element which creeps into his solution of the human enigma.

The most celebrated piece of Ali's work has still to be deciphered. It is called "Jafr wa Jame" and is written in characters to which no one as yet has managed to find a key. The Shia legends say that the parchment is a record of all the big events that are to happen on earth from the advent of Islam to the end of the world. The Shi'ite Imam, Jafar as-Sadiq, is said to have deciphered parts of it while Mehdi, the twelfth Imam of the Shi'ites is said to have deciphered the whole, but, as he disappeared leaving no records, the contents still remain a mystery. It is believed that the Imam will re-appear just before the end of the world.

The brilliance of the remaining sermons and addresses, which have been preserved in intelligible language, provide a thrilling literary experience for all who read them. Irrespective of the march of time they still have the power to captivate the heart and elevate the spirit.

### **Quotations from some of the Sermons and Addresses**

When the people of Busra sided with Ayesha and fought the battle of Camel against Ali, the latter is said to have censured them in a public sermon thus:—

"O ye people of Busra! Your country is near the water but far away from the sky. You lack intelligence and wisdom. Your wisdom has been replaced by folly. That is why you have become the target of every archer, a delicious morsel for the hungry and a victim for every hunter."

(Sermon No. 18. Najh-tu'l-Bulagha)

While exhorting his people to remain steadfast and loyal to him, Ali addressed them thus:—

### **Fidelity**

"Verily fidelity and the observance of one's promises are the companions of truth. I know of no shield which

protects a man better than the keeping of a promise. He who always remembers the Day of Judgment can never be faithless. Alas! We are born in an age when men regard artfulness as wisdom and the ignorant are deputed to consider them wise. May God kill those cunning and crafty men who practise deception on others. The person who can understand the artifice of cunning people clearly knows the way by which deceit would be practised. At the same time he would realise that God disapproves of artifice and he deliberately refrains from practising it though he has the power to do it. But a person who has the audacity to transgress the laws of God considers artfulness as a blessing and thereby benefits by it."

(Sermon No. 45)

Ali is said to have delivered the following sermon before a gathering in his capital:—

### **On God**

"All praise is due to the Creator of the World Whose Wisdom is hidden (from sight). The various objects of nature openly confirm His existence. It is impossible for the physical eye to behold His Majesty. Thus one who has not seen Him has no right to deny His existence. And that heart which has realised His manifestations cannot comprehend Him. He surpasses all in height and superiority. He is the nearest to us and no one can be nearer to us than He. Thus His distant height has not segregated Him from His Creation: and His nearness has not established His equity with the creation. He is that sublime and matchless Being in comprehending Whom intellect cannot reach the bottom of His attributes, yet nothing prevents a person from understanding Him. He is that Being whose existence even an atheist feels in his heart of hearts. Undoubtedly God is free and sublime and bears no comparison with any one then how have the people the audacity to deny Him?

(Sermon No. 53)

In another sermon Ali discussed the evils of the world thus:—

### **On the evils of the world**

“Beware! The world stands on the threshold of decay and destruction. Its mouth sounds the farewell notes of annihilation. It is uncanny and uncharitable. With great rapidity it turns its back. Alas, this world drives its inhabitants into pitfalls of destruction. Through the hands of death it drags its exasperated neighbours to annihilation. Its transparent water becomes bitter and its sparkling spring becomes opaque in the next world. It has nothing to offer except the leavings which stick to utensils (after a meal) or the wet piece of stone which is kept in the mouth to quench parching thirst. Whatever is in the world is rudimental, mortal and perishable.

“O followers of God! Then get ready to leave this abode whose in-dwellers are destined to taste death. Take heed lest the desires and lust should overwhelm you and this transitory life (of this world) should appear a long one to you and its short sojourn be taken as a long one by you. By God! If you grumble and moan like the wretched camels of burden, shed bitter tears like a pigeon and implore forgiveness of God like those monks who have renounced the world and having renounced your worldly goods and family, (which you hold so dear) you come out to seek nearness to God so that He may exalt your lot or forgive some of your sins which the angels have recorded in your character-roll; all these things will have little value as compared with the reward which awaits you if you follow my instructions.

“By God! If for the love of God you melt your heart away and for the love of His rewards and fear of His punishments your eyes shed blood instead of tears and you live in this condition till this world lasts, even then your indefatigable and untiring efforts can be no match for the grand and numerous blessings which God has so kindly and bountifully bestowed upon you. You

can never return the thanks of the Almighty Lord for the guidance He has so mercifully shown to us."

(Sermon No. 56).

### **A Prayer**

"O god ! Pardon my sins which thou knowest better than I, Forgive me even if I commit them again. O Lord Also forgive my promises which I made (to subdue) my passions but which you did not see fulfilled. O Lord! Forgive me those actions by which I sought your nearness through my tongue but my heart failed to accomplish them- O Merciful God! Forgive me the commission of my sins and the unbecoming movements of my eyes, kumbug utterances and the weaknesses of the tongue—all those impure wishes that this heart has entertained."

### **Ali's Dewan**

Ali was also a poet of note. He is said to have left a "Dewan", a collection of over 1500 verses which was named "Anwar Alopeil" and which is still in existence today. The Sunnis doubt its authorship and maintain that it could not be the composition of Ali, who is elsewhere reported as having written not more than two or three verses in his life. The Sunnis maintain that the so-called verses of Ali must have been composed by one of his followers who added to them and edited them in Ali's name. The service rendered by this follower has certainly made the Shi'ite cause more effectual, for the verses emphasise the disabilities and frustration under which the Shias lived and dwell on the differences between the Alid party and its enemies.

Ali in these verses, is shown as a moralist, freely expressing the righteousness of his cause. In them, as in his sermons, he exhorts the pious to be sincere and steadfast, to refrain from wrong-doing and to stick to the faith. The poetry is neither romantic nor lyrical

but reformatory. It contains no sensuous feelings or imagery and has nothing about it of the themes on which the old school of Arab poets delighted to dwell. There is no praise of woman, wine, music and amusement, not even of the sword. Ali's eloquence is reserved for the praise of patriotism, humility, modesty, chastity, piety, and resignation to God's will. Some of his verses are addressed to his followers and are complaints about their infidelity, others extol the virtue of loyalty to the community. Indeed he may be said to have laid the foundation of a national poetry.

The style of the verses, which like Ali's prose is easy, lively and unstilted, makes the ethical truths expounded in them much more palatable than they might otherwise have been. The literary form adopted by Ali in his verses exerted a great influence on the trend of Arabic poetry in general. These verses still retain an importance second to none in Arabic literature.

## CHAPTER XXIV

# LITERARY ACHIEVEMENT (Contd.)

### Ali's Aphorisms and sayings

#### Ali the Second Solomon

Ali, a giant of knowledge and wisdom has been called "a Second Solomon". His witty sayings, which in Muslim countries are still on the lips of the people, dwell on all conditions of life and cover practically all phases of human behaviour. If the wisdom of a nation can rightly be judged by the meaning of its proverbs and aphorisms, then that nation to which Ali belonged must excel all the nations of the world. Great as are the words of Ali, they reveal in even greater degree a personality which was ever in communion with the divine power. Full of ripe wisdom, concise and to the point, they breathe a spirit of selflessness, of devotion to God and regulation of life; they also express eloquently the most profound experiences of human life. They are drawn in general from the precepts of Islam, some of them being ecclesiastical—those wise sentences which have the same force as proverbs and consequently passed into popular usage in a very short time. Some of these, the briefer ones, contain more wisdom than some writers can put into volumes.

#### Adverse Criticism by Europeans

Some European critics maintain that there is nothing new in these sayings, that some of them had been com-

posed by the ancient philosophers, many by the Hebrew prophets; and that analogous expressions can be found in the folk-lore of many nations. Nevertheless nowhere else do we find a stronger impression of Ali's originality than in these sentences. They are strongly stamped with the impress of his personality and experience. He has been considered unique because of his breadth and depth of knowledge, prudence, fore-sighted vision and his humane and catholic sympathies. It is Ali's sufferings that were epitomized in most of his sayings, together with his personal and universal love for humanity, a sympathy which was in no way superficial or sentimental but which was an essential characteristic of his personality. Muhammad (may peace be upon him) was the culmination of the Prophetic line: Ali is the testator of his will, invested with the authority to re-awaken his message and lead it to its fulfilment.

### **Some of the Aphorisms**

Several hundred of Ali's aphorisms have been recorded of which the following two hundred are a fair example, ranging as they do over a variety of subjects.

#### **1. On God**

1. Fear God and you will have no cause to fear anyone else.
2. O God! Shower your bounties on one whose principal treasure is hope and whose chief weapons are tears.
3. O Lord! Forgive me those sins as impede my prayers from reaching thee.
4. O Lord! Forgive me those sins as bring down thy wrath.
5. O Lord! Forgive me those sins as mar my fallibility.
6. Resignation to God's will is the cure of the diseases of the heart.
7. Glorify God even for little blessings.

8. May fear of God check the soul from committing sins and restrain one from transgression.
9. Shedding tears for the fear of God enlightens the heart and fortifies it against the repetition of sins.
10. The word of God is the medicine of the heart.
11. To repose one's trust in God is the Believer's castle.
12. Resignation to God makes the greatest affliction easy.
13. The most detestable person to God is he whose thoughts are fixed upon his belly and his lust.
14. Pray to God to protect you from the mischievous; your wealth and children are trials for you.
15. If you are grateful to God for blessings, He will increase them but to be ungrateful is to stop His gifts.
16. Do not make provision for tomorrow, for God will provide you with subsistence.
17. O God! Strengthen my limbs for Thy service, and harden my wings to reach Thee.
18. He who fears God is safe.
19. A believer always remembers God and is full of thoughts: he is thankful in prosperity and patient in adversity.
20. Fear of God purifieth the heart.

## 2. **World and Life**

21. Lead such a life in this world that when you die, people may mourn you and while alive they may long for your company.
22. The days of life pass away like clouds, so do good deeds during these days which are numbered.
23. Love of the world is the source of misery.
24. The world is the shadow of a cloud and the dream of a slumber.
25. Remember that the worldly pleasures shall come to an end but sins shall remain (for ever).
26. This world is a bridge which leads to the next.
27. This world is a shop of misery.

28. Of all the follies the greatest is to love this world.
29. The world is bitter with all its sweetness.
30. Live with your body in this world and with your faith and works for the next.
31. The diligence of the world is idleness, the honour of it vileness, the height of it lowness.
32. The world is worse than the bone of a pig which is in the hands of a leper.
33. Opportunity is swift of flight but slow to return.

### 3. Women

34. Pride, cowardice and miserliness are bad for men but good for women.
35. A woman's Jihad (participation in the war of God) consists in pleasing her husband.
36. Woman is a scorpion whose sting is sweet.
37. The most happy is he to whom God had given the wherewithal to be content and a good wife.

### 4. Self

38. Remembrance of youth is a sigh.
39. Happy is he who conquers himself.
40. He who knows himself, knows his Lord.
41. It concerns thee more to flee from thyself than from a lion.
42. Your conscience is precious indeed. Do not sell it for anything but Heaven.
43. The disease of the heart is worse than the disease of the body.
44. What a pity to have a sickly spirit and a handsome body.
45. To fight against one's own desires is the greatest of all fights.
46. The strongest from amongst you is he who subdues self.
47. The man who entertains a mean opinion of himself demonstrates the gravity of his understanding

and the abundance of his excellence.

### 5. **Contentment and Greed**

48. Wealth and greed are the roots of all evils and diseases.
49. As long as we do not hope we do not fret.
50. Disappointment goes hand in glove with avarice.
51. Greed mars justice.
52. Contentment is an invaluable treasure.
53. Contentment is a perpetual honour.
54. The contented alone live in peace.
55. Avarice diminishes one's dignity without augmenting one's fortune.
56. The golden and glittering ornaments of the world spoil understanding.
57. Money does not benefit its owner except when he parts with it.
58. Innocence is incompatible with greed.
59. Riches without (the knowledge of) God are the greatest poverty and misery.

### 6. **Aspirations**

60. A man's worth depends upon the nobility of his aspirations.
61. Love of wealth promotes the growth of ambition and kills virtue.
62. The highest aspiration of animals is to fill the belly.
63. The highest aspiration of wild beasts is to tyrannise others.
64. The highest aspiration of woman is to give charm to life in this world and to create mischief in it.
65. The highest aspiration of an Imam (leader of men) is to guide the world.
66. Aspire for the next world and reformation will follow at your heels.

**7. Knowledge**

67. The principal aim of knowledge is the inculcation of virtue.
68. Knowledge enlivens the soul.
69. Knowledge kills ignorance.
70. Knowledge is health and life.
71. The learned lives although he dies.
72. Who teaches me a letter binds me with a fetter (of gratitude).
73. The sum total of excellence is knowledge.
74. The learned are the living ones in the dead mass of ignorance.
75. To respect the learned is to respect God.
76. There is no generosity of spirit with bad knowledge.
77. The pursuit of knowledge is better than the pursuit of riches.
78. Knowledge is the ornament of the rich and the riches of the poor.
79. Knowledge is better than wealth, for you have to protect your wealth whereas knowledge protects you.
80. A learned conversation is the garden of Paradise.

**8. Charity and Avarice**

81. None is more solitary than a miser.
82. Miserliness kills friendship.
83. Generosity hides shortcomings.
84. Let a fortification of alms protect your property.
85. Charity earns applause.
86. The empty coffers of the generous are preferable to the abundant treasures of the miser.
87. The wealth of a miser is as useless as a pebble.
88. Heinous sins are atoned for by helping the poor, the destitute and the distressed.

**9. Death and Desire**

89. Desire is one's most inveterate enemy.

90. Do before you die.
91. Death mocks ambition.
92. Frequent remembrance of death mitigates one's base desires.
93. Those who walk on the surface of the earth shall one day be interred in it.
94. Forgetfulness of death is the rust of the heart.
95. Death is the segregation of the perishable and the mergence into the imperishable.
96. People are asleep when alive, they are only awakened when they die.
97. To loosen the rein of one's desires is to extend an invitation to Death.
98. Every breath of man brings him nearer to death.

### 10. **Patience**

99. Patience is the fruit of faith.
100. Patience is courage.
101. Patience, belief, justice, and Jihad (holy War) are the four (great) pillars of faith; desire, fear and piety are the offshoots of patience.
102. There are two kinds of patience: the one by the help of which we put up with adversity, which is fine and beautiful; but the other kind, by which we withstand temptation is still better.
103. Impatience is more irksome than patience.
104. Perfection consists in three things, patience in affliction; moderation in our pursuits, and the offer of assistance to a supplicant.

### 11. **Virtue**

105. Virtue never dies.
106. Prosperity consists, not in the multiplication wealth and children, but in the enhancement virtue and patience.
107. A man's glory from his virtue is greater than t glory of his pedigree.

- 108. Fall in with virtues and fall out with desires.
- 109. To be good to the good is virtue in its highest sense.
- 110. It is easier to be virtuous than to be vicious.
- 111. No shelter is safer than piety.

## 12. **Courtesy and clemency**

- 112. A man's behaviour is the index of his mind.
- 113. Courtesy costs nothing but buys everything.
- 114. Courtesy is the best inheritance.
- 115. Nothing is more ornamental than courtesy.
- 116. Courtesy creates love.
- 117. Clemency is power and is a sure defence against the vengeance of God.
- 118. Gentle behaviour and courtesy arouse sympathy even in one's enemies.
- 119. Clemency graces power.

## 13. **Laughter**

- 120. A modest smile is the best laughter.
- 121. Excessive laughter ruins the sobriety of an individual.

## 14. **Jealousy**

- 122. Jealousy devours virtue as fire devours fuel.
- 123. Jealousy robs a man of happiness.
- 124. There is no peace where there is jealousy.

## 15. **Backbiting**

- 125. He that lends a listening ear to reproach is one of those that deserves reproach.
- 126. He who bears tales to you certainly bears tales about you.

## 16. **Mercy and Forgiveness**

- 127. What supreme excellence, when mercy is joined with power!

- 128. How mean is punishment in spite of apologies.
- 129. Forgiveness is the crown of greatness.

### 17. **Appetites**

- 130. Control of one's appetites will procure one riches.
- 131. He is wise who governs his anger, appetites and fear.
- 132. Carnal appetites are nets spread by the devil.

### 18. **Prayers**

- 133. Every arrow does not hit the mark, nor is every prayer granted.
- 134. Ostentatiousness spoils prayers.
- 135. The light of your heart is in prayers offered in the stillness of night.

### 19. **Fear**

- 136. Fear none but your sins.

### 20. **Praise**

- 137. He who praises you murders you.
- 138. A man who praises himself display his deficiency of intellect.

### 21. **Parents**

- 139. Honour your parents and your son will honour you.

### 22. **Speech**

- 140. Indeed he is wise who restrains his tongue from detraction.
- 141. A man is hid under his tongue.
- 142. The tongue of a wise man lies behind his heart.
- 143. The heart of a fool lies behind his tongue.

144. A deceiver's tongue is sweet and his heart bitter.
145. A check upon the tongue is better than a check upon the stomach.
146. The tongue pierces deeper than the spear.
147. Beware of the tongue for it is an arrow that often goes wrong.
148. A sweet tongue begets many a friend.

### 23. Heresy

149. Heresy rests on four pillars, (a) concealment of truth, (b) waging of war against truth, (c) going astray from the path of truth, (d) the adoption of an inimical attitude towards truth: the first leads to ignorance, the second makes one blind to truth, the third leads people to seek pleasure in vice, and the fourth leads to misfortunes.
150. He who purifies his heart from doubt is a believer.

### 24. Counsel

151. Partnership in possession leadeth to confusion: while partnership in counsel leadeth to the right path.
152. The opinion of a wise man is an oracle.
153. To seek counsel is to go to the fountain of guidance.
154. He who points out your mistakes is a right counsel.

### 25. Justice and Tyranny

155. Oppression of people is the worst provision for the next world.
156. Association with a fool is tyrannical to the soul.
157. God hastens the fall of tyrants.
158. Divine fortifications protect the country of a just king.
159. Tyranny leads to moral cowardice.
160. Tyranny is the forerunner of ruin.
161. A tyrant's success is his moral defeat.

## 26. **Begging**

162. It is better to die than to beg.  
163. When a person goes to a rich man to beg, he loses two thirds of his faith.

## 27. **Jihad**

164. Jihad (Holy Wars) are the pillars of religion and the highways of prosperity: and those who are engaged in them secure a sure entry into heaven.  
165. Haj (pilgrimage to the Kab'ah) is the Jihad of every believer in faith.

## 28. **Friend and enemy**

166. Indeed he is your true friend who take care of you as himself and prefers you to his riches, children and wife.  
167. A wise enemy is better than a foolish friend.  
168. Your victory over your enemy is your forbearance.  
169. Forgive and forget the treachery of your enemy.

## 29. **Silence**

170. The less you say the more you will be certified.  
171. A man without speech is but an idol or beast.  
172. Silence is the best reply to a fool.  
173. The best speech is one which is short and reasonable.  
174. Silence is the best reply to many a question.  
175. Speech is like a medicine, a small dose of which cures, but an excess of which kills the patient.

## 30. **Miscellaneous**

176. There is no generosity in a liar.  
177. He that has no courage has no religion.  
178. His grief is long whose hope is short.  
179. The right freedom of a man consists in speaking truth

180. Repentance purifieth the heart and washes away sins.
181. Abstinence from evil is better than the performance of good deeds.
182. Adversity makes little impression upon a brave soul.
183. Folly is an incurable disease.
184. That man travels the longest journey who undertakes to search for a sincere friend.
185. Anger is a fire kindled: he that restrains it succeeds in putting it out, but the one who lets it loose, is the first to be consumed by it.
186. To assist the wrong is to oppress the right.
187. One who gives before he is asked is really generous.
188. Sinning is a disease, repentance its medicine, and abstinence from it a sure cure.
189. It is better to sleep with a strong faith in God than to offer prayer in scepticism.
190. Pride impedes progress and mars greatness.
191. The best investment is one with which duties are discharged.
192. Sorrow makes a man old before his time.
193. To forgive is the crown of greatness.
194. That day is really a gala day when a man does not commit any sin.
195. He who understands humanity seeks solitude.
196. He who utters the words of the wise imbibes their essence in his person.
197. Misrepresentation spoils narration.
198. Right is the best argument.
199. Enmity is the occupation of fools.
200. As a man's wisdom increases so his desire to speak decreases.

## CHAPTER XXV

**LITERARY ACHIEVEMENT (Contd.)****Letters and Orders****The Style of Ali's writing**

Most of the letters written by Ali to his contemporaries and the written orders which he issued to his subordinates, display a masterly epistolary style; as does the bulk of his official correspondence with the contemporary rulers of his time. Ali's light, flexible and easy style, together with his preference for the vernacular rather than the ornate classical idiom, was particularly suited to be the art of letter-writing. Arab scholars hold that Arabic prose began with Ali's writings and that Arabic literature has subsequently failed to produce anything equal to Ali's simple and natural prose. The forceful language of his letters, the beauty of the thoughts expressed therein, his wit and sense of humour, his masterly discussions of the reality of things unseen, his abhorrence of the ugliness of worldly things, his picturesque descriptions of his visions of beauty in the life to come, show how versatile his genius was. In these letters the reader finds almost every conceivable topic discussed, from the most thorny problems of politics to the most ordinary, every-day subjects such as family life. On weighty and powerful themes his writings, like those of the Christian preacher, St. Paul, reflect his strong personal emotions; indeed Ali has breathed a spirit of mysticism into them. It is the depth of these thoughts which have led the Shias to revere Ali as a

superman unique in spirituality, from whose elevating writings it is possible to draw inferences that give a message of hope to all humanity. Perhaps this is why Ali's writings have been translated into all the civilised languages of the world and have stood the test of time so well, while Arab writers hold that even if Ali had not been the greatest of Arabic writers, he surely would have been the greatest of men that ever wrote in Arabic.

The vivid pungency of his style unfortunately loses a great deal in translation.

### **Ali's Instructions to Subordinates**

Ali issued a great many instructions to his provincial governors and to district and other subordinate officials, exhorting them to lead a simple life, free of all frivolous gaiety and pomp. They were to refrain from the accumulation of riches, acquisition of land and houses and were debarred from keeping slaves and servants in their homes. Under pain of dismissal, they were enjoined not to accept any present, or gifts of any kind from any one.

A typical story concerns the Chief justice of Kufa. Qadi Shurieh bin Harith, during Ali's reign, was rash enough to buy a house for eighty golden dinars. When Ali heard about it he summoned the Qadi and asked him, "Is what I hear correct, that you have purchased a house for eighty golden coins?" "Yes Your Worship, it is true" replied the Qadi meekly. At this the Caliph cast an angry glance at the Qadi's face and said, "O Shurieh! Very soon that will approach you (death) which will neither look at the document of the sale-deed of the house nor question those signatories who have witnessed the document. Surely that which lies in wait will drive you from the house straightway and bring you to the grave. O Qadi! It is high time that you considered whether you have bought the house with the money of others, and whether you have paid its price with lawful earnings. If the source of income is

from illegal gratifications, then you have lost the house of this world and that of the other world to come. Had you come to me before transacting its purchase, I would have dictated such a document that would have made you to refuse to buy it even for a single silver coin. That document would run like this:

"This is (the site) that a poor slave has bought from another passing-by traveller. The boundary of the house is situated as under:

The first boundary wall ends with afflictions, the second stands on a foundation of miseries and calamities, the third rests on those catastrophic desires which will bring about its fall, and the fourth joins the evil-persuading Satan (into whose compound) the door of the house opens.

The ensnared man in the net of wishes and desires has entered into a transaction with that of a vendor (of the house) who is being pursued by death. Its sale price has been fixed by surrendering the honour of contentment, desire of renunciation, and by the acceptance of the degradation of avarice. If this sale-deed affects the rights of the purchaser adversely in any way, then he should refer the matter to Him, Who brings about the fall of emperors, takes away the life of tyrants, annihilates the proud Chosroes, the Caesars, and the stiff-necked Pharoahs and the rulers of Yemen, and He will judge the account of good and evil of the purchaser and the vendor. His is the court where the transgressor will suffer loss. Intellect is a witness to their Sale-Deed when it is free from the desire of captivity and clutches of the world.

Tyoical of Ali's many letters is the following one, written to Mu'awiya, challenging him to single combat—a challenge which Mu'awiya refused.

"Think what will you do when the gaudy dress of this world, which you have put on, will be taken off from you. The world, having displayed her attractions and by spreading her net of temptation has beguiled you and in response to her voice you have run after her. The

world invited you and you followed her. She ordered you and you obeyed her summons. You have forgotten that very soon. He who can raise you will make you stand at a place where no weapon can defend or hide you. It will be better if you give up your opposition. Prepare yourself for rendering an account and spare yourself from that calamity which is to beset you. Do not lend ears to bad counsel. Should you persist in your wickedness I will have to set you right. What are you? Verily that debauch, who in the iron clutches of the devil fulfills those of his desires which he (Satan) dictates and the devil has become your bed-cover and the mattress of bedding.

O Mu'awiya! Tell me from whence have you become the leader of men and a ruler of the Believers in Faith. Neither did you show any sterling quality of leadership in the "Days of Ignorance" nor at the time of the inception of Islam. I crave God's pardon for the gloom of misfortune. Beware! It is my duty to bring home to you that you are going ahead in the pursuit of vile and evil wishes and your inner self is not in conformity with your outer self.

You have invited me to war. Leave the people alone and come out to fight with me. Let our armies enjoy rest from the participation of battle and let a single duel (between you and me) decide the issue and show whose heart is blighted and who has become blind.

Have you forgotten that I am the same man who, in the Battle of Badr, killed your maternal grandfather, your maternal uncle, and your brother. Surely even today I possess the same sword and the same blood. I have neither introduced any innovations in the religion nor deviated (from the path of) the Holy Prophet. I am standing on that very straight path which you deliberately left when you fell out with me.

You have laid claims that you have come out to fight (against) me as the avenger of Uthman's blood. But you are fully aware where lies the blood of Uthman. If you really want to avenge Uthman's murder, then go

and wreak your vengeance there where his murderers are. But I see quite different things. I see that when the war will strike you with its drawn teeth, you will begin to cry like an overburdened camel. I think that, at a time when your men, by the carnage of our arms, will lie dead in pile after pile, it is then that overawed and bewildered you will look to the Book of Allah; although you have set at naught all its commandments and broken your oath of allegiance."

### **Ali's Letter to his brother Aqil**

"I sent a large army against the enemy. It was on its arrival that the enemy fled, but our soldiers gave pursuit and overtook them on the way. It was the time of sunset and in a single encounter the enemy was defeated and routed.

Let the tribe of the Quraish, in sheer ignorance, retain its enmity towards us and try to develop discord (between us). Do not take any notice of their arrogance and false pride. They, (the Quraish) with one accord, have resolved to oppose me in the same way as they previously unanimously resisted the Holy Prophet. God will wreak vengeance on the Quraish. They have tried to cut my' relationship and have usurped the kingdom of the son of my mother.

You have asked my opinion about the war. I have come to the conclusion that we should fight against the ignorant until I give up my ghost to God. I am neither encouraged by the numerical strength of the people that surround me (my followers) nor do I feel dejected if they desert me. Beware! Should all the people of the world abandon me, you would not find your brother a coward. Under all circumstances you will never find him one who is preturbed by fear or one who will debase himself

1. Ali's mother. Fatima bint As'd had brought up the Holy Prophet, Muhammad, after the death of his own mother and the Prophet used to say, "After my real mother's death I recognise Fatima as my mother, who showered motherly affection on me, when I became an orphan. Hence Ali looked upon Muhammad as the son of his mother.

by accepting a position of dependence. He will never give the reins (of government) into another's hands but he is one about whom a poet of the tribe of Banu Salim has said:

O thou Beloved! You ask me;  
How do I fare?  
Then listen, Well do I resist;  
The afflictions with might and dare.  
I dare not show;  
My wrinkled and worried face;  
To sadden my friends;  
And cheer the foe in waste."

### **Ali's Letter to Malik Ashtar**

Ali, in his written "Firman" gave the following instructions to his general, Malik Ashtar, when he appointed him the governor of Egypt:

"O Malik". Let it be known to you that you have been appointed to the governorship of Egypt. All of your actions will be open to criticism by the people. You should do good deeds. Keep your passions under control. Your dealing with your subjects should be just and fair. Treat them affectionately and love them. There are two kinds of subjects (that you have to govern). 1. They are either your brethren in Islam. 2. Or those (Non-Muslims) who are human beings like you. Intentionally, or unintentionally, they will commit mistakes. It will behove you to excuse them as you expect that God will forgive your sins, because you are their chief.

Never be ashamed if you pardon them. Never feel pleasure in punishing them. Do not be short-tempered. Never say that you are governor over them, for it breeds a feeling of inferiority in them. Should you ever take pride in your exalted position, then think of the power and grandeur of God, for it is the only means to check your arrogance. Remember that God hates the cruel and the arrogant.

Be fair and just for, if you fail in it, you are a tyrant and a tyrant is an enemy of God. God hearkens to the weak and afflicted. Follow the path of moderation in your dealings and try to please your subjects.

It is the common masses that are a great power in the hands of the enemies of Islam. Freely mix with the masses and refrain from the company of backbiters and the wicked. Be broad-minded, overlook the faults of others and forgive them. Do not bear malice against any one and do not do anything which is beneath your dignity. The wicked and the backbiters are very cunning; never lend an ear to what they say. Do not seek the advice of a coward who will make you faint-hearted. Do not take the greedy as your advisers, for they will make you cruel. Above all, bear in mind that miserliness, cowardice and greed ruin a person.

In the selection of ministers see that you appoint those who speak the truth, however unpalatable it may be. Do not seek the advice of those who may flatter you to your face, for flattery breeds arrogance. Do not give an equal status to a bad and a good person. Treat a good person kindly and a bad person curtly. Remember that it is better to rule over the people by love than by fear. Always try to satisfy and please your subjects.

Try to maintain the traditions of those earlier Muslims who brought amity and love amongst the Believers in Faith and tried to reform. In no way should you depart from these traditions. Should you try to introduce innovations you will come to grief. Always seek advice from the learned and wise concerning the reformation of the people. Your subjects are divided into different classes; some of them are soldiers, who fight for God; some are writers; some are Qadis (Judges); some are non-Muslims who pay "Jizya" (poll tax); some of them are business-men, some are craftsmen and artisans, while a few are beggars. Remember that God has fixed a share for each of them.

The soldiers serve as a tort for the subjects. They

are the ornament of the rulers, protecting religion and maintaining peace and order. Take good care of them, as you take care of your children. Love them and treat them kindly.

When appointing Qadis, select holy and pious persons for the post. They should neither be greedy nor make errors in their judgments. In no way should they deviate from truth deliberately. They should not become arrogant when flattered. But, alas, such persons are few. Supervise your officials, who should be appointed on merit and merit alone. Appoint these officials from those families who accepted Islam the earliest for those are the people who attach more importance to the next world than to this. Give them handsome pay so that they may not be beguiled into monetary temptations. Have a good system of spies to observe their activities. And should any of these officials be found guilty of bribery, misappropriation of government funds or any similar offence, punish him immediately. They should be suspended, disgraced and dismissed.

In the imposition of taxes you should see that the people are taxed according to their capacity. Try to populate those towns and places which are thinly populated. In case of famine, failure of crops or the incidence of any other such calamity to the people, you should remit taxes. Remission of taxes at such junctures mitigates the sufferings of the people and betters their lot. Such philanthropic measures will endear you to the people, who will stand by you through thick and thin. Should the condition of farmers be poor, the cultivation of the land is bound to deteriorate. Should the ruler be greedy, the farmers are bound to be reduced to poverty.

Strictly supervise the work of your record-keepers, who should be appointed from amongst those who are scrupulously honest and are humble. In no case should they be negligent in the discharge of their duty and they must carry out your orders implicitly.

Enjoin the business-men and the industrialists to be honest and kind. They are the men who increase the wealth of a nation. Of a peaceful nature, they are great benefactors of man. Extend your protection to them and encourage them to develop trade and commerce. The prices must be reasonable and they must not be allowed to make exorbitant profits. Their weight must be correct and the balance (in their ledgers) must not be false. Defaulters who set these orders at naught should be punished.

Be kind towards the poor and the destitute. Fear God and help them. They need your attention and you should not neglect them because of your other official duties and activities. Show mercy to the aged and the orphans, who have no means of subsistence. Show them your generosity. Above all be humble and benevolent. When you give anything to them, give it cheerfully with a smiling face. Address them kindly and do not put off till tomorrow what you can do today. Fear God and observe prayers which should be perfect and not defective in any way.

Do not be isolated from your subjects and do not stay away from them for a long time, for if you do so, your officials will oppress the subjects.

Sometimes an officer may adopt unscrupulous and crooked means (for self-aggrandisement). Avoid such men and do not show any favours to them. Do not show any nepotism to your relatives, and do not bestow any land on them.

Be just in your dealings with everyone. If any relation of yours commits any offence, you should punish him according to the laws of God. Under no circumstances should you spare him and show him any mercy.

Should your subjects rebel against you because of your strict disciplinary measures, you should explain to them fully the critical situation which has necessitated your adopting such measures and try to win them over. You should always try to make peace with your enemies,

for peace brings happiness and prosperity. Even after the conclusion of peace, be watchful of your enemies for they sometimes try to deceive you. You must keep your promise to your enemy at any cost. Never violate the terms of a treaty.

Neither break your promise with your enemy nor try to deceive him. Avoid bloodshed. Never kill any one without sufficient cause. Verily God will punish, on the Day of Judgment, those who have shed the blood of others unnecessarily. Never consolidate your position by putting men to the sword unnecessarily and unlawfully, for it is bound to weaken the kingdom. Never take pride in your high rank. Treat the subjects kindly and you must act according to whatever promises you have made. Do the right thing at the right time in the right way. Should the people be unanimous about a particular course of action, never thrust your opinion on them.

Never lose your temper and try to keep your passions under control. Always remember God and try to follow in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him). Follow these instructions faithfully and sincerely."

### **Letter to Abu Musa**

Ali, after the battle of Siffin, was forced to appoint Abu Musa Ash'ari as arbitrator. Abu Musa was duped by Mu'awiya's arbitrator, Amr bin As, and after the fatal pronouncement of the Arbitration he wrote a letter to Ali to which the latter replied as under:

"Verily many persons will be deprived of their rewards in the next world. They fall an easy prey to the temptations of this world. I am in a queer fix as regards the problem of the Caliphate. A man, stiff-necked in his conceit, is at logger-heads with me. Surely, there is no one more anxious than myself to keep the solidarity of Muslims, because I strongly hope that God will reward me for these selfless services of mine in the cause

of the unification of the Muslims.

Soon I will fulfil my promise. You turned against the side of the Right and deserted me. Surely there is none more unfortunate than you, because you were deprived of your wisdom and experience. I hate those who tell lies. Now I advise you to renounce and denounce all those orders for wicked and vicious people will attribute them to you."

### **Letter to Sahal bin Hanif Ansari**

Ali wrote the following letter to Sahal bin Hanif Ansari, the governor of Medina, regarding some of the Medinites who had deserted to Mu'awiya and joined his army.

"After the praise of God and prayer for the Holy Prophet, let it be known to you that I am informed that some Medinites have joined the army of Mu'awiya. Do not feel sorry for their desertion. It is good that they have gone, for you are quite free from their mischief. They are worldly people and therefore they have gone after that which they liked much, although they had found the truth. They have been attracted by the temptations of this world and are driven towards punishment. By God! they have changed sides as a measure of expediency for worldly gain. We pray to God to remove our difficulties and make them easy for us."

The combination of dignity, forcefulness, regret and vigour exhibited in the letter quoted above gives the reader considerable insight into the qualities of Ali's mind and heart which led to his being considered far above other men in virtue, insight and understanding.

## CHAPTER XXVI

## ALI, THE FOUNDER OF SUFISM

**Ali, the Wali Allah**

Ali is unanimously acclaimed by the Sufis as the founder of their sect because he combined mystical intuition with the firmest grasp of Islamic theology. The traditions of the Sufis depict him as "Wali Allah" (friend of God) and ascribe to him esoteric spiritual powers. They maintain that the highest aim of knowledge, as preached by Ali, is the awakening of latent spiritual faculties. They hold that if a person follows certain "Tariqas", or "Paths", as laid down by their Saint of Saints, he will be enabled to discover his true and inner self. To this inner self, God will reveal Himself, while the self will disappear in the vision of the All-Absorbing Reality. They quote the personal example of Ali who, amid the multifarious duties of kingship spent wakeful nights in prayer and meditation and thus found peace in the ecstasies of mystic experience. A keen sense of responsibility weighed on Ali's mind and a sudden recollection of a duty unfulfilled would draw a torrent of tears from his eyes, driving him into a fit of melancholy. Often he would sob the whole night through and mortify himself to subdue the temptations of the flesh, then God would reward him with a glimpse of that Inner Vision. Through austerity and prayer, duties which Ali always enjoined on others, Ali was able better to contemplate the Almighty, and through the "Dhikr" or religious exercises that he practised, the Shias believe that other

men can also attain nearness to God.

### **Ali's Mysticism a Practical One**

Mysticism may be a phase of thought or it may be a phase of feeling. Ali did not enter into the philosophical or speculative aspects of mysticism, confining himself to the more practical aspects, based on his own experience and observation. The experience itself brought him face to face with that supreme, all-pervading, in-dwelling power, in whom all things are merged to become one. Such qur'anic verses as "I (God) want to create my viceroy on earth" (2:29). Again "Whatever is in the earth or in the Heavens has been made subject to man" (13:45); "We are nearer to man than the vein of his neck", and "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God," "A people whom He loveth and who Love him", led Ali to lose himself through contemplation, in divine love. Because this direct intercourse with the Being of Beings had made him a partaker of divine revelations, Ali wanted to show other men how they, too, might know the joy and wonder of communion with Almighty God. The practical side of his mysticism was, therefore, the way in which he urged his fellow-Believers to abandon their selfish pride, to discipline the flesh, to submit to the will of Almighty God. Again and again, he exhorted them not to indulge in the gross licentiousness which had characterised Arab society in the "Days of ignorance", enjoining them to live, instead, in simplicity and piety. Even on the battlefield Ali stressed the need to avoid the temptation of the flesh. With death so near them, he urged his soldiers to bear the fatigue of long marches, and the terrible thirsts and hungers as a means of selfmortification, the better to behold their God. Setting a personal example he urged upon them acts of renunciation and saw to it that they were humane to the aged, the weak and the sick. All this Ali saw as a preparation for the life everlasting.

"Man" said Ali, "is a wave in the boundless Sea of God." As long as man's vision is clouded by ignorance and sensuality, man, Ali maintained, will consider himself a separate entity, different from God. But once let that veil between him and God be removed and he will then know himself for what he really is. The 'wave' will merge with the ocean. The enlightenment is needed so that one can first get to know oneself; only then can one get to know God. To this end religious exercises must be practised.

### **Ali, the Prince of Saints**

The Sufis look upon Ali as the founder of that knowledge of "Tasuwuf" which harmonises the mystical, moral and intellectual approaches to Reality. They call the period when he was Caliph, "The Sufistic epoch" and speak with intense pride of the way in which his spiritual intuitions re-inforced the doctrine of "Tauheed" (monotheism); and of how, by his personal example, Ali illumined the way in which the struggles of a man in this world can fulfil the covenant between the created and the Creator.

Ali preached that any form of knowledge which failed to show the Infinite Reality to man was useless, because it could not fill in that vacuum of which the aching soul of every individual was so pathetically conscious. Since virtue purified the soul, its incorporation in one's life paved the way for the spiritual enhancement which the soul craved for. Hence Ali's mysticism, stressing as it did the co-ordination of the mental faculties through the observance of the Shari'a or Laws of Islam, has made a definite lodgement in Islamic thought. The various sects of Islam unanimously look upon Ali as a saint, second to none in the history of mankind for the austerity of his mortification and the rapture of the divine vision to which he was admitted. They recognise Ali as the king of "Auwliyas" who wore the signet ring of saintship, and it is by his intercession alone that the

seeker after God can attain to the degree of "Waliyat" (friendship with God). Hence the doctrine of "Inner Light" can only come by the intercession and affinity with Ali—the only person in authority who can give supernatural guidance.

### **The Importance of the "Shari'a"**

In the early days of Islam the need to regulate one by the 'Shari'a' 'or' Laws of Islam, was taken for granted. Ali revived that necessity and constantly emphasised how essential it was to observe the Shari'a if one hoped to 'see God'. Nowadays, Sufism has rather different characteristics and, with its clear-cut dogmas and commentaries, appears as a distinct, almost separate, system. At some time during the development of the system, adherence to the laws of the Shari'a ceased to be incumbent upon those "Ahl-i-Tasuwwuf" who had attained the goal of the Sufistic path.

Later Sufis made a clear departure from the practices of Shari'a. For instance, in the 12th Century A.D. we come across the great Sufi, Ibn Arabi (1165-1240 A.D.) who describes his heart as a temple for idols, a Kab'ah for pilgrims, the tablet of the pentateuch and the Qur'an; for him religion was Love and Love alone.

Ali's Sufism was of a different cast. Again and again he exclaimed with vehemence how necessary it was to follow the injunctions of the Shari'a, maintaining that that was the only way in which the Individual could attain Absolute Truth. Ali's Sufism was in every way true in spirit to the orthodox Islamic faith and its practices.

In his sermons, as collected in the "Najh-tu'l-Bulagha" Ali frequently makes the point that the teachings of mysticism are identical with the contents of revelation and that an equation of both shows the Believer in Faith the true path to God.

For the uninitiated today, it is difficult to assess the

role of the Shari'a, for the Sufis keep their mysteries secret and do not practice them publicly. When they do express themselves it is in language which is veiled, allusive and metaphorical.

### **Subjugation of the Emotions**

To Ali, Sufism was meant only to awaken piety in an individual—an intuitive experience of the yearnings of an aching soul which seeks repose and bliss. Nowhere did Ali preach total renunciation of the world or urge upon others a completely ascetic life. His Sufism taught him that men were in the world and of the world and that they should not give it up. Nevertheless, in this secular life it behoved the individual to discipline his emotions, to devote his spare hours to meditations, to inflict on himself self-mortification, and to denounce the temptations of the world while still living in it. In its essence, Ali's Sufism was the exposition of a "Theology of the Emotions"; meditation and prayer possessing the power to bring about a change of emphasis from worldliness to unworldliness. The process of subjugating the emotions involved abandoning the pleasures of the flesh and getting rid of evil thoughts and base desires so as to purify the mind of everything save God.

The newly-sprung colonies of Busra, and Kufa in Iraq, diversely populated from all kinds of races, proved fertile soil for the seeds which Ali was to sow. The combined mysticism and asceticism of the clerico-political addresses which Ali delivered to his followers at Kufa, the newly made capital of the Caliphate, show that many of his audience were already accustomed to disciplining their emotions in contemplation. This mysticism, which was both practical and psychological in character readily lent itself to the devotional exercises enjoined by Ali and men thronged from far and wide to hear his sermons.

**Ali's Mysticism, a Stark Necessity**

Ali's war with Muawiya had brought untold misery upon the people; men's minds had been disquieted by the conflict which had never resulted in a really decisive victory for either side, and by the lack of spiritual consolation which they felt defeat had brought in its train. It was against this unhappy background that Ali promulgated and expounded the doctrines of "Tasuwuf". In those days the Sufis were not a separate sect; indeed men who had taken opposite sides in politics and fought against each other were equally drawn towards Ali to listen, side by side, to his stirring addresses as how to strengthen their intercourse with God. In such circumstances it was only natural that the exposition of "Tasuwuf" should appeal to men's heart and captivate them.

It was Ali's mysticism alone which saved his Muslim subjects from the scepticism into which they had fallen. His addresses were a fountain of spiritual consolation to a parched congregation. His exhortations showed the way to the Believers in Faith, drawing them closer together in bonds of union and love for one another.

**The Need for Spiritual Director**

The Sufis from time immemorial have recognised the necessity of a "Sheikh" or "Pir" or "Spiritual Director" to whom humaniy may be entrusted for guidance and instruction. Blind obedience was to be offered to this director, who was supposed to possess hypnotic spiritual powers and to be well acquainted with all the paths of "Tarequit". The disciple was required to remain with him for a number of years until he had familiarised himself with 'mystic' experiences and could himself graduate as a leader.

Since Ali possessed a noble, religious and philanthropic spirit to the highest degree, the Sufi recognise in him their first spiritual Director; he it was who showed

the way to eternal bliss. They hold that if Muhammad (may peace be upon him) was the seal of Prophets, Ali their first leader was, undoubtedly, the seal of saints. Since Ali no one who attains the degree of 'saintship' can have done so without the intercession of Ali.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### SHIAISM

#### **The "Shia'an-i-Ali" or the followers of Ali**

No book dealing with Ali would be complete without discussing Shiaism, the cult of his followers. We have seen that the assassination of Caliph Uthman led to schism in Islam on political and dynastic grounds. In the period of anarchy which followed, the Muslims were divided into four major political parties, (a) "The Traditionalists", or those pious Muslims who regarded the profane secular life of their rulers with disdain, a party which included the 'Ashab' (companions) and the 'Ansars' (Helpers of the Holy Prophet); (b) "The Kharajites", the Puritan Theocrats of Islam, who consisted of large numbers of dissatisfied rebels who had vowed, not necessarily for religious reasons, to wage war against the undesirable Caliphs; (c) "The Mawalis" (clients) an oppressed races which had accepted Islam and which demanded equality of treatment from their Arab masters; and (d) "The Shi'ites" or the followers of Ali, who, having suffered irreparable wrong at the hands of the ungodly Ummayyads favoured the succession of Ali's descendents to the Caliphate.

#### **Shiaism a Spontaneous Growth**

It is a popular fallacy to think of Shiaism as of Persian or Arabian origin. Some scholars maintain that an obscure Arabian sect called Sabaities was the precursor of the Shi'ites, but a closer scrutiny shows

that Shiaism was a spontaneous growth taking place in many lands simultaneously. With the spread of Islam to Persia, India, China, Africa, the Middle East and the Mediterranean countries, it was inevitable that the primitive religion, as preached by Muhammad (may peace be upon him) should be influenced by its contact with Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, all of these religions containing strong elements of mysticism. Vedantic philosophy of the Hindus with its emphasis on the transmigration of the soul, the stress laid by Zoroaster on the theory of the divine rights of Kings, the vigorous penance and exercise in self-annihilation as expounded by Budha and the pantheistic monasticism of Christianity, were bound to have an effect on Islam, particularly as new converts to Islam from these religions retained most of their old social and religious customs. Silently and almost imperceptibly, a general fusion of doctrines and dogmas took place, a blending which led to the development of Islamic mysticism. Thus it would be incorrect to assume, as so many people do, that Shiaism was born either on the 17th Ramdan 40 A.H. (January 24, 661 A.D.), the date of the assassination of Ali, or on the 10th Muharram 61 A.H. (10th October 680 A.D.), the date of the martyrdom of Ali's younger son Hussain at Karbala. The differences between the Shi'ites and other Muslims simply became more pronounced as a result of these murders.

### **The Saba'ites**

The earliest exponent of the Shi'ite doctrines was a Jewish convert to Islam called Abdullah ibn Saba, a native of San'a near Yemen. Ibn Saba incorporated many Jewish doctrines into Islam, giving to his cult the name of Shiaism. Ibn Saba, who had accepted Islam in the reign of Uthman voluntarily took up the role of a travelling missionary, touring from place to place and propagating his doctrines wherever he went.

In the words of Tabari, "Wherever he went, he led the people astray." We read that he visited Hijaz, Busra, Kufa, Syria and finally settled in Egypt. He emphasised the doctrine of "Raj's" or 'Palingenesis'. "Verily it would be a blasphemy" urged he, "to believe in the return of Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah and to repudiate the return of Muhammad which God has announced". In support of his argument, Ibn Saba would quote the Quranic verse, "He who has ordained the Qur'an for thee (Muhammad) will bring thee back to a place of return" (i.e. to Mecca).

Ibn Saba, playing on the ambiguity of the word Mu'ad (which literary means a place of return), believed that it alluded to the return of Muhammad at the end of this world. According to the Sunni writers, his misconstruing the meaning of this and other verses, resulted in the introduction of innovations which brought about many doctrinal changes in Islam.

### **The Doctrines of the Saba'ites**

One of the many doctrines preached by Ibn Saba, was that everyone of the thousands of Prophets that have come into the world, has always had a "wasi" or "executor"; the executor of Muhammad was Ali. Stretching this point further, he maintained that, as Muhammad was the last of the Prophets, so Ali must be the last of the "executors". As a corollary to this proposition, Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman were usurpers. In the reign of Uthman, Ibn Saba is said to have instigated the malcontents to rebel in Ali's favour, and his doctrines received further impetus when Ali's younger son, Hussain, was murdered at Kerbala.

Professor Nicholson<sup>1</sup> speaking of the doctrines of the Saba'ites observes:

"According to Shahrastani, he (Ibn Saba) was banished by Ali for saying ("Anta Anta") "Thou are thou" i.e. "thou art God". This refers to the doctrine

1. R. A. Nicholson—A literary history of the Arabs. Page 216.

taught by Ibn Saba and the extreme Shi'ites (Ghulat) who derive from him, that the Divine Spirit which dwells in every prophet and passes successively from one to another was transfused at Muhammad's death into Ali, and from Ali into his descendents who succeeded him in the Imamate. The Saba'ites also held that the Imam might suffer a temporary occultation (ghayba), but that one day he would return and fill the earth with justice. They believe the millennium to be near at hand, so that the number of Imams was at first limited to four. Thus the poet Kuthayyir (723 A.D.) says:

“Four complete are the Imams of Quraysh, the  
 Ali and his three good sons, each of them a shining  
 One was faithful and devout; Karbala hid one from  
 One, until with waving flags his horsemen he shall  
 Dwell on Mount Redwa concealed, honey he drinks  
 and water bright.”

The Messianic idea is not peculiar to the Shi'ites, but was brought into Islam at an early period by Jewish and Christian converts and soon established itself as a part of Muhammadan belief. Traditions ascribed to the Prophet began to circulate, declaring that the approach of the Last Judgment would be heralded by a time of tumult and confusion, by the return of Jesus, who would slay the Anti Christ (al-Dajjal) and finally by the coming of Mehdi i.e. 'the God-guided one', who would fill the earth with justice even as it was filled then with violence and iniquity. This expectation of a Deliverer descended from the Prophet runs through the whole history of the Shias."

## Shiaism as a Social Revolution

The preaching of the Saba'ites appealed to the

"Mawalis" (the clients), the Non-Arab subjects who made up the vast bulk of the population in the provinces, especially in Iraq in the newly sprung-up colonies of Busra and Kufa. These "Mawalis" partly consisting of local inhabitants of the conquered countries who had accepted Islam, and partly consisting of those Non-Arabs who had been taken prisoner in the various wars of Islam, hated their Arab masters. Prior to the Muslim conquest, Iraq had been ruled by the Persians whose culture and language the Mawalis had adopted, indeed most of them were Persians in race.

The Mawalis suffered many social disabilities, not the least of which was that they were heavily taxed. They had had the monopoly of trade and commerce before the coming of their Arab conquerors, and they had also been the chief class from which civil servants had been drawn. Now although they fought shoulder to shoulder with their Arab masters in all the wars they were obliged to content themselves with smaller pay and more trivial booty. Their position was in all ways anomalous. No longer slaves they were still utterly dependent upon their Arab conquerors whose retinue they formed in time of peace and war. They now claimed equal status with their masters, demanded exemption from taxes and tried to free themselves from the Arab yoke.

For the Mawalis, Shiaism furnished an opportunity to revolt against their oppressors, the Umayyad Caliphs. They were less interested in the restoration of the House of Ali than in the dissolution of the existing order of things and, by introducing all sorts of ancient Babylonian, Persian and Indian beliefs into the body of Islamic thought they brought about a good deal of social agitation which led, in its turn, to the founding of numerous esoteric sects.

### **The Divine Right of Kings**

Those Mawalis of Persian extraction were especially

attracted towards Saba'ism because it had absorbed many of the doctrines of Zoroaster. Being of Aryan extraction, the Persians took as a matter of course the division of society into classes and believed in the theory of Divine Right of Kings. They had considered their Sassanian rulers (212-641 A.D.) to be the emanations of divinity; they were thus the only legitimate successors of the pre-legendary Kayani dynasty and, as such, were imbued with virtue that justified their claim of the Persian crown. The Persians further held that any one who challenged the authority of these rulers was a godless heretic. Hence any substitution of kingship based on Divine Right in place of the Sassanian kings was more in keeping with the old Persian traditions than the system of democratic elections introduced by the Arabs. The doctrine of Imamate may thus be seen as the logical conclusion to older Persian doctrines regarding kingship.

The idea of electing a "Caliph" or "Successor" to the Holy Prophet was quite foreign to the Persians, though it seemed reasonable to the Saracenic Arabs. The Persians thought that to deny the claims of Ali, who was the next of kin to Muhammad (may peace be upon him) was revolutionary in the extreme. Naturally they had a great hatred for the Caliph Umar, who had conquered Persia and incorporated their country into the Caliphate, to be governed as a province from Medina. Their characteristic love for Ali led them to identify him with their Zoroastrian Deity, Ahura Muzda or 'the god of Light' while their hatred for Umar caused them to identify the latter with Ahirman, the Zoroastrian deity of darkness.

Ali's son, Hussain, was believed to have married Shar Banu, a daughter of Yezidgird III, the last of the Sassanian monarchs and hence it was held that the sacred descendents of Hussain were the "Imams" (spiritual leaders) who represented not only the prophetic office but also the virtues of the Sassanian Kings. The question, much disputed elsewhere, as to whether

this marriage had actually materialised or not, never troubled the Persians who still revere the memory of Shar Banu as the mother of the Imams, regarding her with respectful awe as the intercessor on behalf of mankind for God's grace.

The Sunni scholars regard such doctrines as heretical, corrupt innovations introduced into primitive Islam. In the Sunni view, Shiaism was the result of an incoherent social revolution, a hotch-potch resulting from the absorption into Islam of the alien doctrines of imperfectly instructed neophytes. Nevertheless the new cult proved to be both effective and permanent, evolving as it did a distinct and lasting theology with an appropriate philosophy and separate dogmas, doctrines and rituals.

Dr. Lacy O'leary gives a masterly analysis of these historical processes at work in the following words:

"These early sects which were generally regarded as heretical were, in most cases, reproductions of Pre-Islamic, Persian and Mesopotamian religious systems, with a thin veneer of Muslim doctrines and, in the second century of the Hijra, when they became more prominent, they were strongly tinged with Hellenistic philosophical speculations which had already exercised a potent influence in Mesopotamia and Persia. In theory these sects, (Shian-i-Ali), were legitimist in their adherence to the principle of hereditary descent. Orthodox Islam (Ahl Sunnat-w'l-Jumiat) accepted as a constitutional principle the leadership of an elected "Khalif" (Caliph) or "Successor", a natural development of the tribal chieftainship familiar to the pre-Islamic Arabs. Amongst them the chief was elected in a tribal council, in which great weight was given to the tried warriors and aged men of experience but in which all had a voice, and choice was made on what we should describe as democratic lines, and this remained the practice in the earlier ages of Islam. Such a constitutional theory was no great novelty to those who had lived under the Roman Empire, but was entirely repugnant to those educated in Persian ideas, and who had

learned to regard the kingship as hereditary in the sense that the semi-divine kingly soul passed by transmigration at the death of one sovereign to the body of his divinely appointed successor. This had been the Persian belief with regard to the Sassanid kings and the Persians fully accepted Yazidgird the last of these, as a re-incarnation of the princes of the semi-mythical Kayani dynasty to which they attributed their racial origin and their culture. Yezidzird died in A.H. 31 (A.D. 652) and his death terminated the male line of the Persian royal family, but it was generally believed that his daughter Shahr Banu, was married to Hussain, the son of the fourth Caliph, Ali, so that in the descendants by this Persian princess the claims of Islam and of the ancient Persian deified kings were combined. Historically the evidence of this marriage seems to be questionable but it is commonly accepted as an article of faith by Persian shi'ites...."

"At a quite early date, the house of Ali began to receive the devoted adherence of the Persian converts. That Ali himself had been prominent as a champion of the rights of alien converts to equality in the brotherhood of Islam, and still more his harsh treatment by Mu'awiya the founder of the Ummayyad dynasty, caused his name to serve as a rallying point for all those who were disaffected towards the official Caliphate. It is now the general Shi'ite belief that Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, was his chief companion and chosen successor, the three preceding Caliphs being no more than usurpers who had kept him out of his just rights and whose wrong-doing he had borne with exemplary patience. Ali himself does not seem to have taken so pronounced a view, but he certainly regarded himself as injured by his exclusion from the Caliphate. It is not true to say with Muir (*The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline and Fall*, Page 301) that the idea of a divine "Imamate" or "Leadership" was entirely the invention of later times, because as early as A.H. 32 in the reign of Uthman, the Jewish convert Abdullah bin Sab'a of

Yemen—a district which had been conquered by the Persian king Nushervan and settled by Persians for nearly a century before the coming of Islam, and so thoroughly impregnated with Persian ideas—preached the divine right of Ali. This view he maintained afterwards when Ali was Caliph in spite of Ali's own disapproval, and at Ali's murder in A.H. 40, he reiterated it in a more pronounced form; the martyred Caliph's soul, he said, was in the cloud, his voice was heard in the thunder, his presence was revealed in the lightning: in due course he would descend to earth again, and meanwhile his spirit, a divine emanation, was passed on by rebirth to the Imams, his successors."

### **The Doctrine of Imamate**

The acceptance of the Divine Right of Kings lent a religious significance to what had begun as a political movement. The Shi'ites rejected the Sunni doctrine of "ijma" or the "consensus" (of the Community) substituting in its place the doctrine of an infallible Imam. "Ali", says the Shi'ite tradition, "formed a church, appointed Imams as its ministers, settled its dogmas, gave to it doctrines, ritual ceremonies and guaranteed its fidelity." Thus on Ali, and his descendents, the Imams, devolved the exclusive prerogative of hyper-spiritualisation: by virtue of their birth, the Imams were thus the only true successors of the Prophet. The Shias believe that every age produces its own Imam, who acts as a spiritual guide to mankind. It is incumbent on every Shia to believe in all the Imams and especially in the Imam of his own time.

Man, being fallen and weak by nature, could only get salvation, the Shias maintained, through the spiritual guidance of the Imams, while heaven could only become the future home of mankind through the intercession of Imams.

The Sunnis considered their Caliphs to be both temporal and spiritual head of the state, administering

justice through the "Shar'ia" (Muslim Law) and holding office by the will of the "Ummah" (nation). The Shias on the other hand believed in divinely appointed rulers or Imams—the only true successors of the Prophet. They assert with vehemence that the choice of Imamate was not a trivial and ordinary issue which could be left to the will of the masses but one of such sanctity that it was imperative to confine it to the descendants of Ali, who alone among men are qualified to interpret the divine commandments. The Shias thus attribute to their Imams many unique qualities seeing them as quasidivine persons possessed of super natural qualities, "incarnation of divine Light" from the progenitor of mankind, Adam. True theological and religious speculation was thus to be confined to the knowledge and recognition of a true Imam. Some of the most fanatic Shia sects added the heretical doctrines of Anthropomorphism and the return of a Redeemer in the shape of an Imam; some even believed in Metempsychosis. All these sects laid the greatest stress on the infallibility of the Imams . . . a dogma which was to form the basis of shiaism. The more esoteric sects of the Shias attributed to their Imams the exclusive prerogative of the occult interpretation and exposition of the Qur'an.

The historian Dozy<sup>1</sup> summarises the Shia doctrine of Imamate as follows:—

"Premising the Caliph's divinity the dominating sect of those days . . . which had been founded by Kaisan, one of Ali's freedman—reached the logical and melancholy conclusion that faith, religion, and virtue—consisted solely in passive submission and unquestioning obedience to the commands of a man-god. This strange and monstrous doctrine, uncongenial to the Arab character, had been hatched in the brains of the ancient disciples of Zoroaster, who—being accustomed to see in their kings and priests descendants of the gods or of divine and celestial beings—transferred to the heads of the new religion the veneration which they

1. Dozy Reinhart . . . Spanish Islam Page 87.

had previously accorded to their monarchs."

### **The Doctrine of Atonement**

In order to rationalise their theology the Shias expounded the doctrine of Atonement. Their theologians stressed that the martyrdom of both Ali and Ali's son Hussain, was effected in accordance with God's will and with the purpose of saving mankind; and that salvation could only come through their intercession. Thus like the Christian doctrine of atonement the Shias developed and elaborated the tenets of their theology and these latter formed a rigid system. The Christian doctrine of atonement held that Jesus Christ died an ignoble death on the Cross in order, by this sacrifice to secure the redemption of mankind. Not so with the Shias, who believe that an Imam lives in every age, and the last of their Imam Mehdi, also called "Ghiab" (the one who has disappeared), will re-visit this earth at the end of this world. The Shias see in Imam Mehdi the promised Messiah the last redeemer of mankind.

These theological speculations gave rise to many fables and legends which became fused into Shiaism. Popular belief quickly attributed all kinds of miraculous powers to the Imams who were said to have healed the diseases and satisfied the wants of men; certainly the Imams succoured their followers in trouble and distress, fed the hungry, helped the disabled rescued the fallen and above all forgave the erring.

### **The Doctrine of Salvation**

Coupled with the doctrine of Atonement, and somewhat analogous to it, was the doctrine of Salvation. A belief in the mysterious powers of the Imams, the sanctity attached to the cakes and the drinks offered in "Majlis", a symbolic "Potion" to be taken and the observance of certain ceremonial rites were the usual means of salvation for Shias. It is believed that the

Imams visited the "Majlis" of the Shias and produced ecstasy and wonder therein. No matter how righteous a man may be, it is only by the grace of Imam that he can become a recipient of immortality.

### **The Organisation of the Shias**

With the incorporation of the doctrine of Imamate in the popular belief of the masses, the Shias established an unprecedented organisation for the propagation of their faith. Unlike the Sunnis, who did not believe in any priesthood, the Shias organised a hierarchy of ministers, faith being interpreted as blind obedience to the Imamas and their representatives the "Mujtahids", who has the last word on all points of doctrine. In short a Shia ecclesiasticism was established, based on a dogmatic theology. This was later joined by a legal system which further enhanced the already considerable powers of the priesthood. Thus in its essentials, Shiaism was a human-divine organisation which stressed vehemently the quasi-divine nature of Imams. To challenge the infallible authority of these spiritual Directors was to commit an unpardonable offence against God.

By the 18th century A.D. we read that the Shias have established "Lodges", not unlike those of the Freemasons, from where they carried on extensive propaganda both openly and secretly. Such "Lodges" continued to flourish throughout the 19th century.

### **The Results of the Persecution of the House of Ali**

The assassination of Ali, in 661 A.D. by a Kharajite, resulted in the Shi'ites taking up the Alid cause with a new fervour. When Ali's eldest son, Hasan, was compelled to abdicate in Mu'awiya's favour the Shias were led to adhere still more strongly to Ali's house. According to the Shi'ite legends, Hasan was poisoned by Zaynib, a lady hired by Mu'awiya for that purpose.

Sunni traditionalists, however, challenge the truth of that allegation. Ali's younger son, Hussain then aspired to the Caliphate, only to be murdered in his turn on the field of Kerbala in 680 A.D.

Professor Lacy O'leary sums up the results of the persecution of the Alid house in the following words:—

“Certainly the tragedy of Kerbala, which centred in the pathetic sufferings and death of Ali's son, Hussain, as he was on his way to claim the Caliphate, produced a tremendous wave of pro-Alid feelings: indeed a popular martyr was the one thing needed to raise devotion to the house of Ali to the level of an emotional religion, though many no doubt, supported the Alid claims simply because they formed the most convenient pretext for opposing the official Caliphate and yet remaining outwardly within the fold of Islam.”

Thence forward, the house of Ali could do no wrong, as far as the Shias were concerned. All Ali's descendants were depicted as models of virtue and it became the bounden duty of every Shia to espouse their lost cause. The Shia party, as the result of this new rallying of its forces quickly developed into a formidable opposition to the Sunni Caliphs. By a logical extension of the belief that the Imamate was the inalienable heritage of the House of Ali, the Shias were also required to fight against the Sunni Caliph, so that the Faithful might have a truly spiritual leadership.

The connection of the Shia organisation with the Alid cause gave rise to revival of intellectual activities and the Shia theologians now began to consider many ontological problems arising out of the acceptance of Ali as a quasi-divine figure and the abjuration of Free Will which submission to the Imamate logically entailed.

### **Mukhtar the Moses of Shiaism**

Mukhtar, an upstart, described as an “Unprincipled man of heroic mould, a tiger in wrath, and a fox in craftiness”, combined in his person the qualities of a

political adventurer, social reformer, recluse and charlatan. He has been described as the Moses of Shiaism. Unlike the Persian Shias who made it a cardinal point of their doctrine that the Imamate must be confined to the sons of Ali by Fatima, Mukhtar who was of Arab extraction and altogether more democratic, saw no reason why Ali's sons by his second wife, Hanfia, should not succeed to the Caliphate after the tragic deaths of both of Fatima's sons. Accordingly, after the assassination of Hussain at Kerbala, Mukhtar championed the cause of Muhammad Ibn-ul-Hanafiya and collecting numerous Shi'ites, Kharajites and other volunteers under his banner, invaded Iraq. He quickly conquered Kufa, where he tortured and killed Ibn Ziyad, Shimar, and Amr bin Sad, the principal magnates of Caliph Yazid) who had killed Ali's son Hussain so mercilessly. In this way the tragedy of Kerbala was avenged.

We need not enter into details of the causes, the events, or the results of Mukhtar's rising but we must acquaint ourselves with the character of the movement that he so boldly started and championed. It was Mukhtar who rallied all the Mawalis round him to fight against the Ummayyad rulers, securing their active and loyal co-operation by according them that equal treatment which they had so long desired but had never received from their Arab masters. This changed the whole character of Shiaism. From being an anti-Ummayyad move it now became an anti-Arab movement; hence forward the ranks of the Shia were to be swelled by all those dissatisfied Persians and foreigners who found in it an outlet for their bitter hatred of their oppressive Arab rulers.

### **The Division of Shiaism into Many sub-sects**

As time went on, doctrinal points of difference divided the Shias into many sub-sects. The first big division occurred in 765 A.D. on the death of the sixth Imam,

Jafar as-Sadiq. Jafar had nominated his brother, Musa al-Kazmi as his successor, but some of the Shias favoured the claims of Ismail, his eldest son. Those who followed Ismail, held him to be the seventh and last Imam, subsequently repudiating the claims of Musa al-Kazmi and his five successors, the last of which was Mehdi, whose Second Coming at the end of the world is so eagerly awaited. The Ismailis are also called the 'Sabiya' or the 'Sect of Seven', in contradistinction to the 'Ithna Ashariya' or 'the Sect of Twelve'.

Each of these two sects has an infinite number of sub-divisions.

By the eleventh century A.D. the original Shias or "Arab legitimist Shias" had split off from the esoteric Shias of Persia, who held that gnostic Imams could only appear from the offspring of Ali and Fatima. It is these gnostic doctrines which form the basis of Shiaism as it is today, both the "Twelvers" and the "Seveners" agreeing on this fundamental point of doctrine.

Leaving aside the infinite number of sub-divisions, Shiaism today falls into Five main denominations:—

(1) *The Zaydia*, so-called after the name of the fourth Imam, Zayd—a sect which still dominates the Yemen and which stands closest to the legitimist Arab Shias. The Zaydis attach no super-natural powers to their Imams, though they believe in the continuity of the Imams. They are the most broad-minded and liberal of all the sects and base the tenets of their creed on rationalism.

(2) *The Imami* sect of "Twelvers", which prevails in Persia today, although it is in minority in India, Iraq, Syria and Pakistan. The Imamis believe in the theory of the twelve Imams, the last of whom, called "Mehdi" (the guide) who vanished from the earth, is expected to come back to this earthly abode to redeem mankind at the end of the world.

(3) *The "Ismailians"* or 'the sect of Seveners' or 'Batni' (the esoteric sect) or 'Ta'limi' (doctrinaire), was a famous sect of the Middle Ages which with march of

times acquired revolutionary character. Its supporters were the Carmathians (Qarmatis), the Assassins, the men who by administering "Hashish" slew all those who had incurred the displeasure of the Imams; they were a secret society, a group of fanatics entirely without scruple. The stories of Hasan bin Sabah, who wrought such havoc on the Sunni Muslims are well known and need no exposition, though little is known about this sect as the Ismailians have always remained a secret society. Those who have been initiated into the mysteries of the Ismailians do not reveal in public what they have professed in secret. One thing seems certain and that is that Ismail is looked upon by his followers as second only to God. The Ismailis also believe in the doctrine of "Tanasukhl Arwah" (the transmigration of the soul) and lay special stress on "Ta'lim" (doctrinairism) which can only be obtained from the Imam of the time. They also emphasise the peculiar miraculous powers of their Imams, about whom, they allege, testimony can be found in the Qur'an and in the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him). According to the belief of the Ismailians "An Imam can do no wrong".

The late Agha Khan who was the head of the Ismailian sect, until his death in the middle of the twentieth century A.D. claimed his descent from Ismail.

(4) A branch of the Ismailians existing in the Lebanon under the name of "Druzes". The founder of this sub-sect was a man named Darazi, who proclaimed the divinity of the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amri'llah, who was held to have disappeared from the world in 1021 A.D. Like the Ismailians, the Druzes meet in "Lodges", secretly and behind locked doors.

(5) The extreme "Ghaliya" or "Ghulat" (Ultras) who carried the veneration of Ali and his offspring to an extreme had passed the bounds of reason and decency. In their excessive zeal, they raised their Imams far above the degree of human beings, believing that God had become incarnate in their persons. These

Ghaliyas were further sub-divided into a number of branches, one of which, the sect of the "Nusairi", prefer Ali to the Prophet Muhammad and have tried to prove that the proverb 'to err is human' could easily be replaced by saying 'to err is divine'. In their over-exuberant zeal they assert that when God sent Gabriel to earth with his Revelations, the Angel mistook Muhammad for Ali, deceived by the physical resemblance between the two cousins, whose appearance was almost identical; thus, by a divine error, Muhammad was installed in the Apostleship—an office which had originally been designed by God for Ali. The 'Nusairi' who are still quite numerous in Persia today, believe Ali to be still alive and they affirm that he will come like Elias in the clouds at the end of the world and fill this earth with justice and piety. The Persians also name the Nusairi sect "Ali-Illahi"

### **The Deification of Ali**

The numerous esoteric Shia sects, by deifying Ali, created a corporeal God—a doctrine which the traditionalist Sunni Muslims considered a blasphemy and infamy. By developing this doctrine, the Shias next introduced the doctrine of "Al-Holoul" or 'The transmigration of sanctity' from one person to another. God being omnipresent and omnipotent can speak with every tongue and appears in the form of man, especially in the shape of the "Imams" or 'Prophets in miniature'. The sects of Nusairi and the Ishakians promulgated a doctrine which maintains that the spirit may also appear in grosser bodies, offering this as an explanation of angels and devils. They assert that, since Muhammad, there had been no man more excellent than Ali, that Ali's sons excelled all mankind and that God appeared in their form, spoke with their tongue and made use of their hands. In short all the divine attributes were personified in them.

## **The Cardinal Points of Difference**

The Shia schism was a radical departure from primitive Islam (Sunnism), the faith of those traditionalists who conformed to the authority of the "Sunna" or "sayings of the holy Prophet". With the march of time the differences between the two sects became more pronounced; they still subsist and are maintained with implacable hatred. The Shias style themselves as "Adalya" or 'the followers of Justice', stigmatising the "Sunni" with odious appellations. The cardinal points of divergence are:-

(1) The Sunnis credit the 'Sunna' or 'the traditions of the Holy Prophet' as being of canonical authority but the Shia reject the Sunni collections of them as apocryphal and incredible.

(2) The Shias reject the authority of Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman, whom they regard as usurpers, whereas the Sunnis regard them as the lawful successors of the holy Prophet.

(3) Most of the sects of the Shias assign to Ali an equal rank with the Holy Prophet, Muhammad, and some of them in their extreme veneration for Ali prefer the former over the latter.

(4) The Sunnis charge the Shias with corrupting the Qur'an, i.e., distorting the meaning of its various passages, while the same charge is repeated and levelled by the Shias against the Sunnis.

Professor Nicholson, when discussing the points of doctrinal difference between the Shias and Sunnis, says:—

"Consequently the Shias assumed a religious and enthusiastic character, and struck out a new path which led it farther and farther from the orthodox creed. The doctrine of "interpretation" (Ta'wil) opened the door to all sorts of extravagant ideas. One of the principal Shia sects, the Hashimiyya, held that "there is an esoteric side to everything external, a spirit to every similitude in this world, a corresponding reality in the other world;

that Ali united in his person the knowledge of all mysteries communicated them to his son Muhammad ibnu'l Hanafiyya, who passed it on to his son Abu Hashim; and that the possessor of this universal knowledge is the true Imam. So without ceasing to be a Muslim in name, the Shi'ites transmuted Islam into whatever shape they pleased by virtue of a mystical interpretation based on the infallible authority of the house of Muhammad, and out of the ruins of a political party there gradually arose a great religious organisation in which men of the most diverse opinions could work together for deliverance from the Ummayyad yoke."

Professor Guillaume<sup>1</sup> makes the following comments:—

"The most outstanding difference between the Sunni and Shia doctrines of Infallibility and superhuman knowledge is that, with the former Infallibility is not a quality inherent in the prophet by virtue of his being, but a special grace from God. His superhuman knowledge is given to him from time to time by God, whose message he repeats to man. His merit was to be chosen by God to be his mouthpiece. Thus the Sunnis kept much closer to the Qur'anic text, such as verse 47:66 "Say, none in the Heaven and earth knows what is hidden but God." On the other hand, with the Shia a sinless and perfect infallibility is in the Imams and of them. They possess a secret knowledge, inherited from their superhuman forebears, by which they know all that will happen in the world until the Day of Resurrection. Therefore they cannot err. They are the sole and ultimate authority on the interpretation of the Qur'an, the source of all truth, and the only beings with the right to men's obedience. Therefore all doctrines must have their authority. As Goldziher has said, "If we may wish to state concisely the difference between Sunni and Shia Islam, we should say that the former is a church founded on the consent of the community, the latter is an authoritarian church."

1. Guillaume Alfred—*Islam* Page 119. Penguin Series, Ed. 1964.

### Further Divergences: "Muta" and "Taqiya".

In matters of law, the Shia diverged considerably from the Sunni system. The two cardinal points of difference in Shiaism are (1) "Muta" or permission for temporary marriages, and (2) the doctrine of "Taqiya" or Dissimulation.

In "Muta" a man and a woman agree to marry for a specified period. The sanction for this is derived from verse 4:25 of the Qur'an which says "you are permitted to take wives with your wealth in modest conduct, not in fornication, provided you pay them for the enjoyment you have had of them" which according to the Shias was originally followed by the words "for a specified period,"—words which were later deleted.

Takiya could be defined as a dispensation from the requirement of religion under compulsion or threat of injury. In other words it permits denial of one's religion to save one's skin under adverse circumstances. The Shias were constrained to incorporate this doctrine in their system of Law because, being a suppressed minority in the Muslim countries, they felt the necessity of disguising themselves and their creed. According to the Shias Ali is said to have performed "Takiya" in paying homage to the first three successors of the Holy Prophet—the allegiance that he paid to them did not come from the heart but arose out of necessity—for he was released from the obligation to intercede for the Faith with hand and tongue. According to the Shi'ite legends Ali is said to have quoted the Qur'an as an authority for the justification of his stand:—

"He among you who is most honoured before God is the one who fears Him most" (Qur'an 49:13)

According to Shias, "the one who performs Takiya most". The difference in interpretation of this verse depends on whether one of the revealed words was "Taqwa" (piety) or "Takiya" (dissimulation). The

Sunnis who consider that "piety" was the right word do not therefore see eye to eye with the Shia interpretation of the Quranic text.

The Shias allege that the justification of Takiya depends upon one's intentions at the time: a Shia faced with death, imprisonment, flogging or any similar heinous bodily injury may always conceal his identity and this the Qur'an sanctions in the following verse:—

"If any one is compelled and professes unbelief with his tongue while his heart contradicts him to escape his enemies, no blame falls on him because God takes his servants as their hearts believe."

(16:108)

The Sunnis disagree with the Shias about the interpretation of this verse also, declaring that the verse was revealed with particular reference to the case of Ammar bin Yasir, who was forcibly compelled to worship idols and abjure his faith in the ministry of the Holy Prophet, and that the verse was not meant for universal application.

Though divine authority set Ammar's mind at rest, the Sunnis believe that steadfast martyrdom for the Believers in Faith is enjoined in the Qur'an and that the concealment of one's faith because of fear is cowardly, profane and degrading to a true Believer. Consequently they look down upon the Shia doctrines of "Muta" and "Takiya" as the legislation of adultery and the condoning of a lie for which no divine sanction exists and which cannot be justified on any grounds.

### **The Lasting influence of Ali and His Descendants**

The martyrdom of Ali and his son Hussain, and the influence of their personal example, left permanent effects on all the creeds of Islam. Their sublime and magnificent sacrifices and their unique commentaries on the doctrines of Islam left a permanent hold on all Muslims. The Shia theory of Imamate has been

accepted practically by all sects and almost every Muslim believes that Imam Mehdi, will appear at the end of the world to redeem mankind. A belief in the supreme piety of Ali and his descendants, particularly the heroic stand of Hussain at Karbala and his martyrdom, and the veneration attached to him, has also become deep-rooted in the minds of the Believers in Faith and no other persons have been so much sanctified as Ali and his descendants. Today, even after a lapse of 1375 years they remain, par excellence, the personification of piety and the most eminent of all Muslims save only the Holy Prophet.



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